

Averroes, the *Decisive Treatise*



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Averroes, the *Decisive Treatise*

**The Connection Between Islamic Religious Law
and Philosophy**

Edited with an Introduction by

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M.C.

INTRODUCTION

I. THIS BOOK AND ITS TITLE

The first issue of this book was published in Italian in 1994—over twenty years ago. I had already updated it for its second and third issue, both again in Italian. This English version—the fourth—led me to further in-depth revisions in order to better specify its philosophical and religious value on the one hand, but also its political value on the other. Meanwhile, Averroes’ bibliography has been greatly enriched and I have further developed my own interpretation, even reversing it as far as certain aspects are concerned. The translation has been affected by this re-directioning, and it has been slightly modified, yet not overturned, (hopefully) improving the rendering of Arabic without giving up on the fluency of expression.

The first clue to this new approach lies in the title itself. In 1994, it appeared in Italian as *Il trattato decisivo sull'accordo della religione con la filosofia* (namely, *The Decisive Treatise on the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy*), an utterly traditional rendering; this time, two important changes have been performed: the title has become *Il trattato decisivo sulla connessione della legge religiosa islamica con la filosofia* (*Decisive Treatise on the Connection between Islamic Religious Law and Philosophy*). It is a modification which, at least in its first part, is mirrored in the title-giving of two modern translations into English of the work. In 1962, indeed, George Hourani spoke of “Harmony of Religion and Philosophy” (*Averroes* 1976). In 2001, Charles Butterworth chose “The Connection” (*Averroes* 2001).

The problem is *tout-à-fait* of epistemological nature and it revolves around the sense to be given to three Arabic words in the original title, namely *ittiṣāl*, a term that etymologically actually rather means “conjunction” than “harmony”; *ṣarīʿa* which means religion, but here specifically in its juridical rather than dogmatic dimension; and also *ḥikma*, which does actually mean “philosophy”, but obviously in a different sense from *falsafa*.

These are not merely linguistic issues. On the one hand, as regards *ittiṣāl*, “agreement” and/or “harmony” imply that religion and philosophy are placed on coinciding levels and match as in a mirror; whereas “connection” and “conjunction” imply that religion and philosophy are placed on parallel levels, corresponding to each other but *not* coinciding. This means that the two dimensions, though touching, preserve their independence and distinctiveness, whereas agreement or harmony implied they might melt or be interchangeable.

Furthermore, the Arabic originals for “religion” (*ṣarīʿa*) and “philosophy” (*ḥikma*) in the title are potentially problematic. The term *ṣarīʿa*, rather than “religion” in the current and common sense, means “religious Law”, which has been revealed in its fundamentals: this specification is not a minor one, both because Averroes himself was a famous jurist, and notably because of the fundamental role the Law, God’s own decreed jurisprudence, has in Islamic “religion” (*dīn*). Furthermore, the original meaning of *ṣarīʿa* alludes to an ethical direction, to the “way” leading the believer to a righteous behaviour.

Analogously, *ḥikma*, meaning properly “wisdom”, alludes to a particular hue of “philosophy”. In Arabic, to indicate philosophy, there exists the word *falsafa*, a neologism moulded onto the Greek *philosophia*, which is actually linked to a thought declination somehow closely connected with the Hellenic heritage. Yet the fact that Averroes rather preferred using *ḥikma*, whose root is Qurʾānic (thus, it is not a neologism), in the very book he dedicated to the defence of philosophy against theologians-jurists and which harks back to wisdom or knowledge—both rational and intellectual and prophetic—cannot be accidental. In many places, indeed, when referring to Muḥammad and other prophets, the Qurʾān says many times that God revealed the “Book”, “Scripture” (*kitāb*, namely the Qurʾān itself) and the *ḥikma* (cf. for example Q. 2:151, Q. 2:231 etc.), which in the Holy Book is certainly meant as wisdom and knowledge. *Ḥikma* therefore certainly(also) alludes to “philosophy”, yet in a sense, so to speak, more Islamically connoted than *falsafa*.

Thus, the Arabic original *Kitāb Faṣl al-Maqāl wa taqrīr ma bayna al-ṣarīʿa wa’l-ḥikma min al-ittiṣāl* in a philologically more exact rendering would sound: *Book on the distinction of discourse and the determination of the connection between revealed Islamic Law and [philosophical]*

knowledge. There is quite a difference to *Decisive Treatise on the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy*! Epistemological consequences are remarkable, as we shall see. The awareness remains that the “distinction of discourse” is “decisive”.

The *Kitāb Faṣl al-Maḡāl* is a very dense and complex book, albeit short. Since the beginning, I should like to point out that its main themes are:

- The discussion of the relation between religion and philosophy;
- The Qur’ānic exegesis;
- The relation between Being and language;
- The outline of a sociology of knowledge.

I will analyse all these four themes in an attempt to show their functional connection.

II. AVERROES’ LIFE AND WORKS

When, in 1168, Averroes (Abū’l-Walīd Muḥammad Ibn Aḥmad Ibn Ruṣd) was introduced by the already famous philosopher Abū Bakr Ibn Ṭufayl¹ to the Almohad caliph Abū Ya‘qūb Yūsuf (*reignavit* 1163–1184), he was a mature man of over forty, having been born in Cordova in 1126. There is no doubt he was a very educated man; that he was to be introduced as the heir to a distinguished family, is

¹ He is the philosopher known in the West as Abubacer, the author of a work—the *Philosophus Autodidactus*—whose title in Arabic is *Risālat Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān* or *Epistle of the Alive, Son of the Awaked* (Italian translation Ibn Ṭufayl 1983; English translation 2015). It is a peculiar novel, soaked in Neoplatonic spirit, according to the best Arab philosophical tradition, which would syncretically join Plato and Aristotle: the author tries to show that religious truths, revealed through the Scriptures, may be attained through the philosopher’s self-aware meditation and rational development. The philosopher may rise beyond the observation of wordly things to the contemplation of a transcendent and pure spirit God, thus converging with the Muslim who was bred from childhood in the teaching of the Law. The ways of reason and those of the heart, of Orthodox Law and rational Mysticism (since such is ultimately Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān’s gnostic asceticism) flow into the only goal, that of *taḥḥid* or God’s Unity, the authentically living, eternal and invisible Being.

also certain;² it may be a little too much to presume that “he had already written important works of science and philosophy”,³ since his theoretical production up to then was limited to some *ġawāmiʿ* or “summaries” of Aristotelian works,⁴ and the historian al-Marrākušī admits that it is precisely from 1168 on that “[Averroes’s] fame and celebrity among men started”.

Even though it is a very well-known passage, al-Marrākušī’s account of Averroes’s introduction to the Almohad caliph⁵ is worth reading once again, at least in part:⁶

This Abū Bakr (Ibn Ṭufayl) continued to draw men of learning to the Prince [Abū Yaʿqūb Yūsuf] from every country, bringing them to his attention and inciting him to honour and praise them. It was he who brought to the Prince’s attention Abūʿl-Walīd Ibn Rušd; and from this time he became known and his ability became celebrated among men. Ibn Rušd’s pupil, the lawyer and professor Abū Bakr Bundūd Ibn Yaḥya al-Qurṭubī told me [...] that Ibn Rušd had told him:

“Abū Bakr Ibn Ṭufayl summoned me one day and told me: “Today I heard the Prince of the Believers complain of the difficulty of expression of Aristotle and his translators, and mention the obscurity of his aims, saying: “If someone would tackle these books, summarize them and expound their aims, after understanding them thoroughly, it would be easier for people to grasp them”. So, if you have in youth abundant strength for

² Averroes’ grandfather was an important Malikite jurist as well as a great *qāḍī*, i.e. supreme magistrate in Cordova. The same office was bestowed onto Averroes’ father, Aḥmad, who died in the very same year, 1168.

³ Hourani 1976, p. 15.

⁴ We are reminded here of the summary of the Aristotelian *Organon* by the Arabic name of *Muḥtaṣar al-Ḍarūrī fīʿl-Mantiq* and a *Ġawāmiʿ ʿan suḡar al-Falsafa*, i.e. a compendium of philosophical sciences.

⁵ See Morata 1941.

⁶ Al-Marrākušī, *Muʿġib fī Talbīs Aḥbār al-Maġrib* (or *The Wonders of the Maghreb Historical Events’ Summary*), ed. Dozy, cit., in Hourani 1976, pp. 12–13.

the task, perform it. I expect you will be equal to it, from what I know of the excellence of your mind, the purity of your nature, and the intensity of your application to science. I myself am only prevented from this undertaking by my age, as you see, my occupation with government service, and the devotion of my attention to matters which I hold more important'. Abū'l-Walīd said: 'This was what led me to summarize (*talbīs*) the books of the philosopher Aristotle''.

Beyond the fact, as was already remarked by George Hourani, that this passage shows, on the one hand, Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf's philosophical curiosity—or even passion—and, on the other, the substantial limitation of the spread of philosophy to the caliph's restricted *entourage*, one must highlight how the office Averroes was charged with by the Prince of Believers, namely to compose summaries and commentaries of Aristotle's and his epigones' works, seems to make of our thinker an "organic intellectual" of the Almohad regime—a supporter of Almohad politics. We shall discuss this hypothesis in detail further below. Here shall it suffice to say that it cannot have been by accident that Averroes would become, as early as 1169, *qāḍī*, or supreme judge, in Seville, to then reach the highest office of *qāḍī* in Cordova in 1182, being simultaneously also the caliph's own personal physician. This dazzling career reveals that our philosopher was at least popular at court.

Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf was the greatest of the Almohad monarchs, the Berber dynasty who dominated Maghreb and most of Spain in the 12th century.⁷ His philosophical inclinations are well-known,⁸ showing an intellectual open-mindedness that clashed with the strict traditionalism of the ruling class of jurists (*fuqahā'*) and of orthodox religious scholars (*'ulamā'*), who adhered mainly to the Malikite school of Law.⁹ Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf offered protection to

⁷ A work that was fundamental for a long time was Huici Miranda 1956–1957. An effective synthesis in Abu'n-Nasr 1987, pp. 87–102. More recently, cf. Fierro 2012 (a collection of formerly published articles) and Fromherz 2010.

⁸ Cf. Hourani 1976, p. 11.

⁹ Malikism, together with Hanafism, Hanbalism and Šāfi'ism, is one of the official Law schools in Sunnite Islam (cf. Coulson 1964). For Aver-

thinkers such as Ibn Ṭufayl, who was charged with several political and administrative responsibilities,¹⁰ and later to Averroes. Yet this does not mean that philosophy was well-accepted in the Andalusian and Moroccan milieus, or even in the Empire's capital Marrākuš. When introducing his theological work *Disclosure of the Proof Methods Concerning the Principles of Religion* (in Arabic: *Kašf 'an Manābiḡ al-Adilla fī 'Aqā'id al-Milla*), Averroes acknowledged that the thought of his time was dominated by the Aš'arites,¹¹ "who are considered by most people as orthodox and as defenders of the tradition today".¹² The bonds between Aš'arism and Malikism are well-established and evident in the theoretical work by the founder of the Almohad movement, Ibn Tūmart.¹³

However, with Abū Ya'qūb Yūsuf the Almohad religious policy experienced at least a partial turn. As an enemy of the traditional interpretation of Law grounded on the blind submission to the sayings of the ancients (*taqlid*), the caliph went so far as to have the books by the Malikite jurists publicly burnt. In the *Decisive Treatise*, Erwin Rosenthal wrote, "Ibn Rušd acknowledged the reform of the Almohads" [cf. *infra* p. 118], and the passage "allowing for a possible tendency to flatter the Almohad rulers suggests that the Almohads did something to acquaint the masses with the plain meaning of the *šari'a*, contrary to the practice prevailing under the Almoravids, their predecessors, who kept the masses ignorant. It must also mean that they raised no objection to the activity of men like Ibn Ṭufayl and Ibn Rušd in expounding the inner meaning of

roes' figure as a lawyer in the context of Muslim Spain see Brunschvig 1962, Turki 1978 and Urvoy 1978, pp. 178–181 spec.; finally, again Urvoy 1991.

¹⁰ Chejne 1980, p. 286.

¹¹ On Aš'arism, one of the greatest theological Islamic schools, see note 23 to the text and Gimaret 1990.

¹² *Manābiḡ* translated in Alonso 1947, p. 204.

¹³ On Ibn Tūmart, it is still worthwhile to consider Goldziher 1903; more recently, with bibliography, Urvoy 1991, pp. 11 ff. On relationships between Malikism and the Almohad movement, cf. also Caspar 1987, p. 189, and Laoust 1983b, p. 218. Puig Montada 2010 systematically analyses Ibn Tūmart's thought and further reflects on the issues that were hinted at here.

ṣarrʿa by means of demonstrative arguments”. The Almohads’ merit would have been, then, following this analysis by Rosenthal, that of not hampering the free philosophical scientific research, and, simultaneously, looking after the people’s spiritual health spreading the knowledge of the fundamental faith dogmas.¹⁴ Not all that glitters is gold, though. Rosenthal himself underlines that in other works, for instance in the *Commentary to Plato’s Republic*, Averroes would not deny that the Almohad regime looked very much like the timocratic tyranny as described by Plato. However, Averroes’ discourse is never explicitly derogative towards the Almohad caliphs, who are recognised the merit of having tried to put a brake over the puritan Berbers’ fanaticism.¹⁵

Globally, then, it is quite likely—in my opinion even certain—that Averroes was, so to say, a “man of the court”, even if not a courtier; and his theological work does not appear alien to the political approach the Almohads had wanted. Averroes’ thought had in fact a clear political significance: Averroes considered a profound political transformation as the only way to face the numerous issues of his time. The criticism towards to the existing [religious] practice, the approval of Plato’s far-seeing recommendations, the points made upon the close bond between human law, the *nomos*, and Divine Law—all indicates that the new political reality that Averroes had intended did not totally agree with the predominant opinion of that time and that place, not to speak of the agreement with the very religious Law.¹⁶

This is perhaps the best key to understand why, all of a sudden, Averroes was disgraced. Once Abū Yaʿqūb Yūsuf had died and his son Yūsuf Yaʿqūb al-Manṣūr (1184–1199) had succeeded him, Averroes was tried and sentenced to confinement in Lucena, a town not far from Cordova (1195). How should this event be interpreted? According to Hourani it was an actual anti-philosophical persecution, performed “evidently with a large consensus of public

¹⁴ Rosenthal 1958, p. 182 (already translated in Campanini 1989, pp. 137–138). Urvoy’s analysis (1991) is substantially convergent.

¹⁵ Rosenthal 1958, pp. 191–194.

¹⁶ See Butterworth 1986.

opinion".¹⁷ On the contrary, Badawi holds that the cause of Averroes' disgrace was the envy of the courtiers, who managed to exploit both the potentially dangerous contents of his philosophical books and some compromising friendships: "this shows that it is not philosophy at all that they wanted to hit with Ibn Rušd".¹⁸ Cruz Hernandez, finally, says that Averroes was marginalised because he had been the spokesman of a sort of Andalusian "nationalism" which might have damaged the domestic unity and peace of the heterogeneous Almohad empire, originating from Africa, which had to blend Arab and Berber elements.¹⁹ Personally, I find these explanations interesting, but not fully satisfying: Hourani's, because it neglects Averroes' role of "organic intellectual" and the (relative) intellectual open-mindedness of the Almohad court; Badawi's because, although it is in my opinion the closest to truth, it reduces the disgrace to mere, banal court bickering; Cruz Hernandez's because it excessively modernises the culture of a time in which it is unlikely for me that a "nationalist" spirit existed in the modern sense. From my point of view, I believe that Averroes must have been the object of court rivalries and malignant suspicions that involved his activity as a thinker. Yet the triggering cause of this may have been the, not always benevolent, criticism which he had given Almohads in his *Middle Commentary to Plato's Republic*.

In this book (the dating of which is quite uncertain, even if I believe it may be placed around 1190, and whose Arabic original has not reached us while we possess a medieval Hebrew translation), Averroes formulates the project of a philosophical state government in the light of religion, explicitly exhorting the Almohad caliphs to promote it. In doing so, though, as we have just hinted at, he does not spare any strict judgment upon the political and moral situation of his time and the very ruling dynasty. This might have indeed roused Yūsuf Ya'qūb al-Manṣūr's anger who, ill-advised by the adversaries that Averroes no doubt had at court,

¹⁷ Hourani 1976, pp. 16–17.

¹⁸ Badawi 1972, II, pp. 741–742.

¹⁹ Cruz Hernandez 1985, II, pp. 24–27, and Cruz Hernandez 1986, pp. 28–32.

might have meant to punish him (a kind of analogous hypothesis is supported by al-Jābrī 2001a).

A final solution to the mystery is probably impossible. What is a fact is that as early as 1198, Averroes had gained his independence back, which suggests either that the caliph had been “forced” to exile Averroes by the effect of pressures he had yielded to, but then regretted having done so; or that the forces which were hostile to the philosopher had quickly lost their vigour. In any case, the romantic interpretation of Averroes as a martyr of free thinking, as a victim of the *‘ulamā’*’s religious obscurantism (also supported by the famous film of the Egyptian film-maker Yusuf Chahine, *Destiny*), must be abandoned or at least blurred. Averroes played too great a role in the prevalent political and intellectual context to be considered alien to or irregular by it. Old already, the philosopher was recalled to Marrākuš by the caliph al-Manṣūr (as a sign of renovated trust or to be better controlled?), and there he died in the very same year.

III. THE MEANING OF AVERROES’ WORK

The previous historical and biographical *excursus* has not only an informative purpose; on the contrary, it has the precise purpose of highlighting how Averroes’ position was very well placed within the historical and political framework of his time and his land. Averroes was at once a good Muslim;²⁰ an intellectual linked with the ruling regime; a renowned lawyer and a sincere philosopher, eager to re-establish the sense of the “true” Aristotle that al-Fārābī’s or Avicenna’s Arab-Islamic *falsafa* had, according to him, dangerously compromised with Neoplatonism.²¹

The excavation of, and precise analytical work on, Aristotelian texts, from which originated Averroes’ widest scientific production,

²⁰ About this issue, see Hourani 1978; Cruz Hernandez 1985, n, p. 24. Fakhry 1968, p. 82 writes that “al-Kindi and Averroes are maybe the two philosophers who best illustrate, so to say, the ‘marriage’ of philosophy and dogmatism in the Islamic world”.

²¹ Let it suffice to recall Cruz Hernandez 1985, II, pp. 23 and 47, and Leaman 1985, pp. 16 and 39. The cultural relevance of Averroes’ project to comment on Aristotle is underlined by Puig Montada 2002.

namely the “great” or literal (*tafāsīr*) and “middle” (*talāḥiṣ*) *Commentaries* as well as the epitomes (*ḡawāmi*), which turned Averroes into the “Commentator” *par excellence*, Dante’s “Averrois ch’el gran Comento feo” (*Inferno*, IV, 144), worthy thus to be welcomed into the Limbo of humanity’s great spirits; this excavation work, as we were saying, was pursued alongside a tireless activity as a law scholar and theologian and—as was often the case with many an Islamic philosopher in the Middle Ages (Avicenna, Avempace, Ibn Ṭufayl...)—, as a physician.

In the medical field, Averroes composed a book, the *Kulliyāt* (“Comprehensive”),²² well-known in the medieval West by the title of *Colliget*, which, though not reaching the height of Avicenna’s *Canon* (which was studied in Europe until the 17th century), nonetheless represents a remarkable contribution to the discipline for the time in which it was written.

In the legal field, Averroes composed a handbook on Malikite Law (the widest spread school in the Maghreb and the one he would himself belong to, even if in a critical manner), *The beginning of the scholar engaged in the effort of personal reworking and the end of the scholar balanced in the questions of the Law*, which is still authoritative today, but which does not appear particularly rationalistic nor “liberal” (in the *Commentary to Plato’s Republic*, Averroes supports gender equality, for example, but you will find nothing of the kind in the Law handbook. Moreover, Averroes present a rather aggressive notion of *ḡibād*).

In the theological field he drew up the essay *Disclosure of the Proof Methods Concerning the Principles of Religion* (in Arabic: *Kaṣf ‘an Manābiḡ al-Adilla fi ‘Aqā’id al-Milla*), mentioned earlier, which in turn is strictly linked to that borderline work between theology, Law and philosophy which is the *Decisive Treatise*, and the famous *Tabaḥfut al-Tabaḥfut* or *Incoherence of the incoherence [of the philosophers]*, written as a response to the criticism of the šāfi‘ite thinker al-Ġazālī (d. 1111) in the equally famous *Incoherence of the philosophers* (*Tabaḥfut al-falāsifa*).

²² *Al-Kulliyāt*’s medical work was composed, according to Alonso 1947, p. 54, before 1162, while Cruz Hernandez 1985, III, p. 47, suggests an unspecified date between 1163 and 1169.

In view of a further and better insight into the relationship between Averroes and the Almohads and the political significance of his work, a homogeneous interpretative paradigm is to be looked for. The French scholar Dominique Urvoy has hypothesised that the three works represent a unique block, meant to support the Almohad caliphs' action. The *Decisive Treatise* would then constitute the judicial-philosophical justification of Almohad theology; the *Disclosure of the proof methods* the systematic exposition of the main themes of such theology; and the *Incoherence of the incoherence* the demonstration of the agreement of Almohad theology and philosophical rationalism. In fact, Urvoy deems Almohad theology, as exposed by the *mabdi* Ibn Tūmart, decidedly rationalistic, in turn forcing a bit the sense and the scope of the texts that have reached us.²³ Marc Geoffroy also strictly linked at least the *Decisive Treatise* and the *Disclosure of the Proof Methods*: “the two texts are not to be dissociated, one must read them *together* and consider them as two aspects of the same judicial-dogmatic project. [...] One text and the other contribute to the defence of this project by constantly pursuing the identical strategy: to play the Almohadism card against Aš‘arism”,²⁴ that is to perform an ideologic-religious reformation, promoted by the caliphs, which should have marginalised the conservative ‘*ulamā*’ in favour of a (more) rationalistic vision of the world. Josep Puig Montada has rather softened the interpretive certainties of Urvoy-Geoffroy, yet he has not at all denied the necessity—or at least the possibility—to read Averroes’ theology politically.²⁵

On my part, I believe that Averroes was in some way influenced by Almohadism. Moreover, I believe that, apart from question of detail, the three theological books possess an eminently political purpose in spite of departing from a religious-philosophical base. There is no room here to discuss the arguments underpinning

²³ Cf. at least Urvoy 1998. Obviously, it is a peculiar rationalism here, which tried to synthesise the Islamic classical religious and theological tradition with a certain interest in scientific and philosophical issues, as well as refusing the syncretism of Law and mysticism attempted by al-Gazālī. Cf. also Puig Montada 1992.

²⁴ Geoffroy 1999.

²⁵ Puig Montada 2010.

the interpretations hinted at just above. I rather think it useful, on my part, to suggest a proposal whose sense can be summed up as follows. In my opinion, Averroes certainly fought against the traditional Malikite-Aš'arite theology, which was rather conservative, in the light of a "theological Almohadism", with political consequences as well, which, just as certainly, included rationalistic cues. Yet, on the one hand we must not overestimate the Almohad rationalism, whereas on the other, the three works are not as homogeneous as it might seem at first sight. Then, in conclusion, the *Decisive Treatise* would legitimate the philosophical inquiry (*ḥikma*) in the light of the religious Law (*šari'a*); the *Incoherence of the incoherence* would try to respond, philosophically indeed, to that Aš'arite theologian with strong philosophical inclinations that was al-Ġazālī; whereas the *Disclosure of the Proof Methods* would deconstruct traditional theology from within, so to speak, trying to demonstrate how theological problems can be dealt with more appropriately with philosophy-based tools.

This paradigm may be substantiated as follows.

As far as the so-called Almohad "rationalism" is concerned, one must start from what is the cornerstone principle, namely the profession of God's Uniqueness and Oneness (*tawḥīd*). The very Arabic name of the Almohads, *al-Muwahḥidūn*—that is, those who profess God's Uniqueness and Oneness—declares the centrality of that theological foundation. Naturally, it is all but an original principle. Uniqueness has been at the centre of all Islam, since its origins; and anybody trying to lift the banner of reformation within Islam, has done so in the name of the intransigent call to uniqueness and inimitability of the divine being. In the heart of Almohad thought, *tawḥīd* meant, on the one hand, to trace a sharp ontological difference between the Creator and the creatures, and on the other, to deny the metaphysical pregnancy of divine attributes—this latter theme being widely discussed in Muslim theology. Denying attributes brought Almohadism very close to Mu'tazilite dogmatism and once more separated it from Aš'arism.²⁶ Ibn Tūmart,

²⁶ Although it's true that Ibn Tūmart acknowledged God with the seven attributes of the essence identified by Aš'arites (cf. Laoust 1983b, p. 218).

the founding *mahdī* of the Almohad movement, had particularly insisted on the rational demonstrability of God's existence; God's existence is necessarily demonstrable and necessity means absence of doubt, so to say "clarity and distinction" in the theoretical formulation: concerning this, the "book" by Ibn Tūmart (*Aʿazzu mā yuṭlab*), an asystematic collection of texts which had been attributed to the *mahdī*,²⁷ is not to be misunderstood. The method to profess Uniqueness is grounded on intellect: "The *tawhīd* method is reason (*ʿaql*) and the same happens with *tanẓīh* [doctrine of transcendence] and there are no means, for either, to appeal to the transmission of traditions (*tawātur*)".²⁸ The demonstration of God's existence is moreover a theological *topos*, not only the Islamic one: it is the famous topic *a contingentia mundi*: beings are imperfect and contingent and they need a perfect, absolute and necessary Creator. Although God's existence can be demonstrated through intellect, it is also grounded in the Holy Text. Ibn Tūmart, in his *ʿaqīda*, namely "catechism", "faith profession", exclusively employs Qurʾānic evidence. It is a doctrinal prerequisite of Almohadism that we may only speak about God with the words He himself used in the Qurʾān, when describing himself. On the one hand, it is illicit to try and refer to God human qualities or categories; on the other, the value of self-evidence, of self-certification, as it were, of the Qurʾān is confirmed. This is the meaning of the Qurʾānic obviousness upon which—as we shall see at the proper time—Averroes' hermeneutics shall be exerted. Furthermore, the philosophers living at the Almohad court, Ibn Ṭufayl and Averroes, seem to have been affected by that Tūmartian faith profession and it has been proved that Averroes wrote, in his youth, a commentary about the *ʿaqīda* of Ibn Tūmart.²⁹ Some have even gone so far as to hypothesise that

²⁷ Ibn Tūmart 1997.

²⁸ *Le Livre d'Ibn Tūmert*, Algiers, 1985, cit. in Urvoy 1998, p. 51.

²⁹ Urvoy 1998, p. 57. It seems that the Moroccan scholar Muḥammad Ben Sherīfa has found a manuscript that contains Averroes' commentary, which hasn't been published yet though, even if it might modify (we can't say whether much or little) the critical attitudes discussed herein.

the *ʿaqida* contained in Ibn Tūmart's book *Aʿazzu mā yuṭlab* was almost certainly written by Averroes.³⁰

The elements of the Almohad ideology that we have thus far mentioned had been formulated as an explicit contrast to the Almoravides—the dynasty preceding the Almohads in Morocco and al-Andalus. Almoravides didn't work out a theology with the theoretical depth of Ibn Tūmart's, nor had they been able to rely on prestigious intellectuals who would defend their positions like Averroes, so they were an easy target for the Almohad criticism. They were accused of literalism and anthropomorphism, even if these accusations were likely to be ungenerous and deriving from adverse propaganda. Now then, against any God's anthropomorphism and assimilationism to the contingent world of matter (*taṣbīḥ*), of which the Almoravides were accused, Ibn Tūmart preached the legitimacy of an allegorical interpretation (*ta'nwīl*) of the Qur'ān ambiguous expressions—the necessity of an allegorical interpretation bringing Almohadism closer to Averroes' philosophy. Yet again, the *mahdī* did not only sponsor a more sophisticated and refined reading of the Holy Texts, he supported, in parallel, the necessity to "go back to the sources" (*ruḡū' ilā al-uṣūl*). These sources are the Qur'ān and the *sunna*, whose study had to prevail again over the dry record of Law cases, as well as the Companions' consent, the *iğmā'*. The call to the prevalence of the *uṣūl* over the *furū'*, the branches of the Law, made up another aspect of the controversy led by the Almohads against the Almoravides. It is important to stress here, though, that Ibn Tūmart did not only target a political regime in particular, rather the whole Malikite ruling class dominating in al-Andalus. As opposed to the supine compliance to tradition (*taqlīd*) typical of the Malikites, Almohad theology expressed itself in favour of a relative open approach to Law standards. Malikites elevated their doctors' personal opinion (*ra'y*) to a normative standard and unquestioningly abided to that authority, suffocating free rational inquiry (*iğtibād*): on the contrary—so believed Ibn Tūmart and the Almohads and Averroes—, jurisprudence must be supported by the objective standards of the Law

³⁰ Cf. M. Fletcher 1994.

sources (*uṣūl*) and by the statements of the revealed text, but intellectually elaborated.

This doctrinal opposition further concealed the fight for the ideological control of society. It is worthwhile then to recall that the fight against Malikism became particularly bitter at the time of caliph Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb al-Manṣūr who went so far, in al-Andalus, as to publicly burn the most representative texts of that school. The contrast between Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb al-Manṣūr and the '*ulamā*' reached its apex at a time that was not so far from that when Averroes experienced exile, which shows how likely it was for the philosopher to have fallen in disgrace because of an unfavourable intervention by Malikite lawyers.

Almohad theology had thus precise political implications and it supported a different Law and Law interpretation model from the Almoravid and Malikite ones. Although opinions differ on this point among scholars, this is why some have claimed that from Ibn Tūmart on, Almohadism possessed clear Zāhirite inclinations regarding Law. Zāhirism refused to subject the text to allegorical human interpretations which would put the purity of God's direct revelation in danger; nevertheless, Zāhirism was all but irrationalistic as the intellectual quality of its major representative, Ibn Ḥazm of Cordova (993–1064), shows. The literal adherence to the text in religious and legal contexts might indeed have opened to the independence of reason in the fields of science and philosophy.³¹ It was further thought indispensable to go back to sources, thus anticipating Almohadism, namely the Qur'ān and the *sunna*. The call to the texts and back to the sources was not a mere doctrinal question, but it was mirrored in the political action of the Almohad establishment. One of the pillars of their ideology was, in fact, the indoctrination of the masses on the one hand, and on the other the (relative) protection of philosophical and rational research. Almohadism required the support of the masses to its doctrine and took great care of propaganda. It pursued the goal not to have the people participate in power in the modern democratic sense, not at all, but rather to at least look for a legitimisation of its authority with the people's support. Well aware of the different intellectual abili-

³¹Al-Jābrī 2001.

ties and capabilities of men, Almohadism applied a progressive pedagogy, proportional to the gifts of the single individuals. The literal approach to the Qur'ān is a duty for the uncultivated masses; exegetic research and rational elaboration are a duty for those who possess the necessary skills. The problem of the relationship to the text—particularly urgent with Averroes who, as we will see very soon, theorized a precise sociology of knowledge—was then justified in the Almohadism view. Moreover, according to one interpretation, the *Incoherence of the incoherence* and the *Disclosure of the Proof Methods concerning the principles of religion* by Averroes were meant not to destroy the sense of the divine (*ma'na al-ilāhiyya*) as possessed by common people;³² this means that common people must possess a religious inclination that will ensure their access to the future life, but which was actually in harmony with the Almohad political project.

This attempt at religious integration justifies, or at least places itself parallel to, the Almohad policy of restricting religious freedom of expression and openly fighting the Christian kingdoms of Northern Spain. It is precisely because living conditions under the Almohads had become harder that Maimonides' family emigrated, settling in Egypt. Almoravides had already got to the Iberian peninsula, called by the *reyes de taifas*, to hinder the Christian advance. Almohads took up a policy of *ḡihād*.

Regarding this, the analysis of the Law treatise by Averroes is quite interesting. The Law treatise (*The beginning of the scholar engaged in the effort of personal reworking and the end of the scholar balanced in the questions of the Law*, or *Bidāyat al-bidāya*) was composed around 1168 and it was certainly the cause of Averroes' promotion within the *magistrature*. It represents one of the most directly political contributions that Averroes made to his contemporary culture, directly deriving from his office as a lawyer. The beginning of the scholar engaged in the effort of personal reworking and the end of the scholar balanced in the questions of the Law is an *iḥtilāf* work, namely a work in which the legal opinions of the main scholars of all orthodox Islam schools are discussed and compared. In harmony with the Almohad attitude, of course Averroes lets the preeminence of

³² Urvoy 1991, p. 84.

the Law foundations emerge, namely the Qur'ān and the *sunna*, over the Law branches, that is, over the practical application of general theoretical principles; and he claims that the necessity of the foundation validity is superior to any school tradition, even the Malikite one, to which he officially belonged. Yet, the interesting feature making the *Bidāya* a functional text for Almohad politics has been underlined by Brunschvig.³³ In the first draft of his work, Averroes does not deal with the Pilgrimage to Mecca (the *ḥaǧǧ*). Only later will he add a *Kitāb al-Haǧǧ*, a book explicitly dedicated to the pilgrimage. Why is that? We have said that the Almohads fought for *ǧihād*, especially against the Christian kingdoms of Northern Spain. The *ḥaǧǧ* was a long and dangerous journey which might have distracted forces that could have been more useful for the “holy war”. Well, according to Brunschvig, at Averroes’ time the caliph Abū Ya‘qūb Yūsuf had personally dictated a collection of traditions exalting the holy war and among them he had included a famous *ḥadīṭ* handed down on ‘Abdallāh Ibn ‘Umar’s authority: “A military expedition on the way to God [a *ǧihād*] is worth fifty pilgrimages”. Thus, obeying his caliph, Averroes would not deal with pilgrimage so as not to exaggerate its importance if compared to the *ǧihād*. Later on, though, when the caliph al-Manṣūr, Abū Ya‘qūb’s successor, decided to support an interventionist policy in the East and particularly in Egypt, the *ḥaǧǧ* became decidedly relevant again. This is why Averroes would have added the chapter about the pilgrimage in the *Bidāya*.

The Almohad “rationalism” was then soaked in practical and political motivations and it had to keep into account certain legal and religious issues. However, it was all but liberal-oriented. Looking specifically into Averroes’ work, we must first of all remember that he drew up works by a double writing and comprehension register: that of the intellectual scholar in religious science (*‘alim*, plural *‘ulama’*) and that of the philosopher (*ḥakīm* or *ḥakīm*). What matters here is not simply that he belonged, so to speak, to two heterogeneous “corporations”, but that there is a precise difference in cultural orientation. Averroes was indeed, as we have seen, a professional judge and jurist (*faqīh*), his educational background being

³³ Brunschvig 1962.

primarily not philosophical. Furthermore, judicial thinking is analogic and topical-dialectic, whereas philosophical thinking is syllogistic and demonstrative. Averroes was both—a jurist and a philosopher—and knew how to think in both manners, but he changed register in writing according to the public he was addressing.

This has got two important implications. First, as has been underlined *ad abundantiam*, Averroes, performing his activity as a jurist, was personally involved in the Almohad ruling power structure. On the other hand, his wish to be wholly a philosopher put him in contradiction with his public office. We may hypothesise that he experienced a conflict between a double loyalty: that to pure science—philosophy—which tended to be frowned upon by the establishment, and that to applied science, characteristically Islamic—law—, whose *practitioners* made up the ruling class of the Almohad empire and were conservative, to the point of burning al-Ġazālī's works in public. This, from an epistemological point of view; from a political point of view, the (few) philosophers in al-Andalus did certainly not represent a danger for power, whereas the powerful class of the Malikite *'ulamā'*, which jurists belonged to, did: the caliph had to take them into account and consider their opinions.

Although documents do not allow us to reconstruct contexts in minute detail, we can say, with a good approximation, that Averroes wrote the *Decisive Treatise* as a juridical *fatwā* intended to support the religious legitimacy of philosophy against the conservative Malikite *fuqahā'*. Thus, he experienced the conservative Malikite *fuqahā'*'s hostility. They attacked him in a moment of weakness of the caliph, who was then obliged to disgrace, try and exile him. Despite it being likely that his (temporary) disgrace did not originate in the opposition to philosophy in itself, but rather in court disputes and rivalries as we have said above, it is yet evident that the excuse for a sentence must have been philosophic: the cultivation of insights that were opposed to the official religion and so dangerous for the state. Sentencing him because of philosophy, the role of Averroes as a magistrate, jurist and man of the court was also struck.

Then, dialectics which is at once ideological and political underpins the dialectics between theology and philosophy in Averroes. I believe it is possible to explain this confrontational relation-

ship putting forth a genealogic interpretation of his theological thought. Averroes' theological works, namely, the *Decisive Treatise*, the *Disclosure of the proof methods concerning the principles of religion* and the *Incoherence of the incoherence*, all three drawn up between 1179 and 1180, appear closely intertwined. The base of everything is the *Decisive Treatise* whose purpose, as has been said, is the legitimisation of philosophy in the light of Law, or rather the belief that practising philosophy by insiders is made mandatory by the Law. Averroes speaks as a jurist, addressing the Malikite *fuqahā'*: they must stop condemning philosophy, since it is a rigorous discipline, approved of by the very Qur'ān (encouraging the use of rational thought) and capable of reaching a truth and certainty level from which theologians, not to speak of common people, are extremely far away. Philosophy and religion are identical twins and they do not contradict each other because they formulate the same truths in different languages. Finally, the exhortation to jurists and theologians is not to indulge in sectarian differentiations endangering the state's welfare and stability. The Almohad regime favoured this harmonisation in society and hindering their project would be irresponsible. The *Disclosure of the Proof Methods* deconstructs traditional theology and in so doing it reveals its political background.³⁴ Averroes' new theology indeed transcends the purely religious fact and it is elaborated in support of Almohad politics. While bitterly disputing Aš'arite theologians (and the greatest amidst them, al-Ġazālī, in the *Incoherence of the incoherence*), Averroes reconstructs and re-founds theology along a "middle way" (*wasat*) helping to soothe sectarian conflicts and allowing to re-balance and pacify society.

On the one hand, the point is to acknowledge religion's positive role as a "necessary civil art" (*ṣinā'at ḍarūriyya madaniyya*)—as Averroes explicitly states in a famous passage precisely in the *Incoherence of the incoherence*—, a passage which greatly contributed in creating the myth of a misbelieving Averroes:

Philosophers believe that religions are necessary constructions of civilisation (*ṣanā'i' ḍarūriyya madaniyya*) and that religious principles derive from the intellect and from the revealed Law

³⁴ Averroes 2001.

as far as the common elements to all confessions are concerned, although [regarding the resurrection problem] religious Laws may more or less diverge. [Philosophers] further think that it is unnecessary to dispute, through statements or denials, any of the general principles [of religion] such as, for instance, whether it is obligatory or not to serve God or, even more important, whether it is true or not that God exists. The same reasoning is repeated with other principles, such as the existence and the gradations of other-worldly bliss: indeed, all religions agree in admitting of another life beyond death, in spite of differing when describing its modes. In the same way, all agree in admitting God's knowledge, attributes and acts, although they then differ more or less stressedly about God's essence and His way of action. Analogously, they again all agree in saying that there are acts that lead to bliss in the hereafter, despite differing in their assessment.

To sum it up, according to [philosophers], [religions] are necessary because they lead to wisdom (*hikma*) in ways which can be shared by all mankind, whereas philosophy (*falsafa*) only leads a limited number of intelligent individuals to the knowledge of happiness. [Philosophy] implies learning wisdom, while religions aim at teaching the common people in general. Nonetheless, there exists no religion which does not pay attention to the peculiar needs of the knowledgeable, although it primarily deals with everything the mass may take part in. Yet since the [cultivated] élite perfects itself and reaches its full happiness in relation to the masses, universal teaching [of religion] is necessary for the existence and the life of this privileged class, both in young and old age—there can be no doubt in this—so that it succeeds in drawing on what is characteristic of its state.³⁵

³⁵ Averroes 1997, pp. 533–534. I have kept my Italian translation because I believe Van Den Bergh's English translation (Averroes 1954) to be out-of-date.

Obviously, Averroes had no intention to downplay religion; rather to stress its political and social value. In Western Renaissance in particular, this subtle ponder over the weight of religion became surreptitiously an open declaration of unbelief.

In Averroes' eyes, a political and religious reformation process has to be activated. Once he has accomplished the *pars destruens*, Averroes moves on to the *pars construens*. At this point, though, Averroes does not feel at all the need to offer a constructive theological work (the *Disclosure* is a dialectical work), which would have remained within the boundaries of an imperfect epistemology; so, he directly passes on to the higher level of knowledge, philosophy. In addition to drawing up the well-known Aristotle commentaries, here is Averroes composing the commentary to Plato's *Republic*³⁶ having the practical purpose, starting from a philosophical base, to hint at the best way to manage the state in coherence with Islam's principles. We are actually facing a "breviary", so to say, by which Averroes meant to teach an enlightened dynasty (the Almohads) how to build up and Islamically rule a state upon philosophy's rational foundations.

On a theoretical plane, our philosopher studied Plato's *Republic* because he considered it the practical part of political science (the Aristotelian *Nicomachean Ethics* was considered as founding the theoretical part of political science; yet, as far as practise was concerned, the Stagirite's *Politics* had not reached al-Andalus, so one had to fall back on the *Republic*). Once they are extrapolated from the Platonic context, Averroes' analyses in the *Commentary* evidently display a propedeutic and pedagogic purpose aiming at the philosophical education of the Almohad ruling class. Averroes indeed states that rulers must be fair, wise, balanced and honest, far from the tyranny and timocracy which had characterised the Almoravides. A succession of enlightened sovereigns (like the Almohads) affects the state and leads to a good rule. So, Almohad sovereigns must join philosophy with wise ruling, so as to innervate orthopraxis with orthodoxy. Averroes incites the Almohad sovereigns to make philosophy the foundation of their social reformation in-

³⁶ Averroes 1974. On this work of Averroes', cf. above all Butterworth 1986 and De Souza Pereira 2013, but related literature is quite wide.

spired by religious principles. Averroes' goal is legitimate, yet he pursues it by both criticising the Almohads' slowness and uncertainties and the Malikite religious establishment, which represented a brake to reforms. While he did not spare any criticism towards those protecting him, whose reforming action seems to him too timid and hardly effective (since not yet philosophical?), he considered Malikite theologians as dangerous subverters of the public order because of their indulgence towards moral and cognitive lassitude.

Philosophy appears then as a sharp tool to critically deconstruct and reformingly reconstruct—at the service of an enlightened dynasty. Of course, it's a discipline that often does not harmonise with Muslim religion, but Averroes made all possible effort to “connect” it to religion. It is important to underline that Averroes had a precise project of philosophical and religious reform in mind. With this background, it seems quite interesting to remark that in the *Disclosure of the Proof Methods*, speaking as a theologian, Averroes interweaves his own anti-Aš'arite argumentations with Qur'ānic quotations. The call to the Holy Book is telling since the different linguistic registers consent to speak in a persuasive manner both to the common people who expect to be confirmed in their faith and to the *mutakallimūn* theologians-jurists who must open up to a correct perception of the Law.

Islamic monotheism, the statement that there is no god outside God, is for Averroes the sole criterion to distinguish a Muslim from a non-Muslim, a criterion whose worth is quite superior to that of any philosophical discrimination. *The Incoherence of the incoherence* is just as soaked in theological issues. Which means, as we shall discuss later on, that Averroes' intellectual attitude is not one of rigid and inflexible rationalism—if by rationalism we mean to give up any reference to revelation—, yet sufficiently inspired by both philosophy *stricto sensu* and by Islamic religion.

Averroes defines God as “the one necessarily existing (*waḡīb al-waḡūd*)”, a positive attribute strictly connected to the nature of divine essence.³⁷ All reality is aimed at God;³⁸ and Islam is no

³⁷ Averroes 1930, p. 399 (transl. Averroes 1997, pp. 381). Roger Arnaldez deals with this problem (1957b, an article published in Spanish

doubt the best of religions because it has known how to blend prophetic inspiration and lucid intellectual research.³⁹

IV. BEING AND LANGUAGE IN THE *DECISIVE TREATISE*

These complications in Averroes's thought—his undisputable attempt to be at once a believer and a philosopher—are fully reflected in the *Decisive Treatise*, making it, somehow, a dishomogeneous and sometimes ambiguous book, certainly not a text of absolute and undeniable rationalism as implied by Léon Gauthier's interpretation,⁴⁰ which was worked out a long time ago and is yet still sharp.

The Decisive Treatise, though, is centred on a “strong” statement (cf. *infra*, p.81: the True cannot counter the True, that is, there can be no contradiction between revelation and reason, between religion and philosophy. Philosophy cannot invalidate religion (nor vice versa),⁴¹ on the contrary the two dimensions of knowledge bear each other support and witness. I shall soon get back to this presumed Avverroist concordism and to my personal opinion on the matter. Before this, though, I deem it appropriate to underline two consequences which directly descend from the assumption I have just mentioned:

translation in Martínez Lorca 1990, pp. 428–439), stressing that “as God transcends thoughts and things, the essence and the existence, which are not to be distinguished in created beings, so will they, on a divine level, be perfectly undistinguishable. So, to say that God exists for His essence has no precise meaning, as we must do nothing but inextricably unite, identify in the divine Self, what would stay separated in nature” (p. 434 of the Spanish translation).

³⁸ Averroes 1930, p. 232 (transl. Averroes 1997, p. 252).

³⁹ Ibidem, pp. 583–584 (transl. ibidem, pp. 534–535).

⁴⁰ Gauthier 1909, pp. 108 and 131. It must be reminded that there sometimes exists a noticeable gap between what is stated in theological works such as the *Decisive Treatise*, the *Disclosure* or the *Incoherence of the incoherence* and what can be read in the *Commentaries* to Aristotle, in which, speaking merely and exclusively as a philosopher, Averroes formulates much more compact and internally necessary thoughts.

⁴¹ Cf. Leaman 1988, p. 130.

- the consent to religious truths is *obligatory for all*, from the farmer shoveling the soil to the philosopher who peruses the skies with his/her mind and elaborates the most refined physical and metaphysical theories;
- there exist several ways to turn to truth; different types of consent to the same truth; different layers of truth.

The first misunderstanding to be avoided is, as we have said from the very beginning when discussing the title, that the *Decisive Treatise* is a book written with the purpose of demonstrating that religion is connected with philosophy; it must be rather powerfully underlined that philosophy is a discipline which is not at all alien to an authentic religious spirit, placing itself on a legitimate level—both rational and juridical—parallel to that of religion. In other words, if I may be forgiven the hyperbole, it is not so much about rationalising religion, but rather about sanctifying philosophy.⁴¹ Research has by now demonstrated in a sufficiently persuasive manner that the *Decisive Treatise* is a *fatwā*, i.e. a “legal opinion” (not a sentence nor a condemnation as it is often said nowadays!) enacted by Averroes as a *qāḍī*, a judge. With the *Decisive Treatise*, Averroes addresses not so much philosophers, whose respect for religion he takes for granted, but rather the Malikite ultraconservative jurists,⁴² whose bad faith he wants to protest against as well as their prejudicial condemning attitude towards philosophy. Through his *fatwā*, he aims to induce Malikite jurists not to oppose the study of philosophy, since it is by no means unbelief nor contrary to religion. Certainly, the expression “sanctification” of philosophy may appear excessive; and quite rightly Alain De Libera responded that the purpose of the *Decisive Treatise* is to “legalise” philosophy, legitimising it, indeed, from the legal point of view.⁴³ Yet, I also mean to say

⁴² Cf. Hourani 1976, p. 17. Rosenthal 1958, pp. 177 ff. particularly insists on the fact that Averroes was above all a Muslim (and quite a more rigorous believer than al-Fārābī or Avicenna) and only secondly a peripatetic philosopher.

⁴³ De Libera 1996, pp. 67–68. According to Mahdi 1984, p. 189, Averroes’ position is neither legalistic nor demonstrative, but a middle way between the two. This would determine oscillations and even contradictions in Averroes’ thought. On the one hand, there would emerge

that through this legalisation philosophy joins in the number of the permitted, authorised sciences, those even “made obligatory” by religion. In any case, it is clear that the purpose of the *Decisive Treatise* is political: “it is a book by a Muslim scholar addressing a political power, a book of fight, directed against Malikite ultraconservative jurists, a book by a jurist who constantly employs analytical reasoning”.⁴⁴

In the light of this connection between rational thought and juridical-religious thought, which does neither imply mutual reduction nor absorption, Averroes admits that as the philosopher needs the Qur’ān, so must the philosopher also respect and worship the Holy Text: the Qur’ān, indeed, addresses all people, “the white and the black”, the cultivated and the uncultivated, the naive and the clever. How could a philosopher deny God’s Uniqueness, the truthfulness of Muḥammad’s prophetic mission,—God bless and save him!—, the rise or the punishment after the Judgment Day? These truths are such for him as well; the philosopher must also give them his unconditioned consent, just like the rough common man or the dialectic theologian (*mutakallim*), well-trained in the arts of argumentation. Therefore, according to Averroes, revealed religion addresses all humanity, while philosophy is reserved only for those who are able to understand it and practise it.

The problem arises on a further level, one worthwhile explaining with some examples. The Qur’ān, like other religious texts, speaks of Paradise and Hell; as a matter of fact, the common man and the philosopher must believe that they exist without arguing about it; though while the common man needs, in order to avoid the risk of falling into unbelief, to hear Paradise described as a green lush garden, in which the clearest rivers flow and one will meet the most beautiful girls, it is quite obvious that such a naturalistic and sensual explanation is totally unsatisfactory for the philos-

“Averroes’ efforts limits in determining the connection between religion and philosophy upon legal grounds” (p. 193; but also cf. p. 197). On the other, even claiming that the Law recommends philosophy, Averroes would not explain exactly “what philosophy is”, that is why his attitude would remain hypothetical (cf. also pp. 199–200).

⁴⁴ De Libera 1996, pp. 67–68.

opher. The latter will prefer to consider paradise bliss as purely spiritual and shall have the right, or rather the duty, to go beyond the apparent letter of the Holy Text in order to *speculate* as to the theoretical and abstract significance of the otherworldly reward or punishment. This indication is so much more ineluctable when we are discussing subtle and potentially dangerous issues for religion such as the essence of God. That God exists and He is One is a patent truth, easily comprehensible even to the uneducated; yet, for instance, the solution to the problem of how attributes (life, power, knowledge, hearing, sight, etc.) inhere to God's essence cannot be within the grasp of the uncultivated. Such a solution must be reserved for the philosopher. Careful here: says Averroes to the philosopher, *not* to the theologian. Why is that? Because the philosopher will perform a scientific demonstration, self-evident, unshakable in its pre-requisites and its conclusions, while the theologian will be tied to subjective opinion, to discussion, to individual and topical dispute, which may not be concluded with the formulation of universal and certain propositions such as the philosophical ones, but only with particular and likely propositions. Averroes also considers as peculiar to philosophical inquiry the allegorical interpretation of ambiguous verses in the Qur'ān, such as the anthropomorphic ones that seem to attribute to God a body or hands or capacity of movement, thus overriding theology's priorities and usurping its proper field of inquiry.

Now, it seems necessary to go further:⁴⁵ the consequence we can apparently draw from the previous analysis is that the connection between philosophy and religion is pursued on the linguistic level through the reduction of the metaphysical problem to a linguistic problem—something, at a first sight, akin to logical positivism. But really the matter is subtly different, because in Averroes' view, the ambiguous expressions of the text are *oriented* towards their true meaning by hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*), the highest philosophical art of interpretation. This does not absolutely mean that for Averroes Being is language; rather that, as Georg Gadamer put it, "Being, as far as can be *understood*, is language". If comprehension

⁴⁵ I resume here the arguments I discussed already in Campanini 2007 and Campanini 2016.

in hermeneutics implies that the truth of a proposition does not express Being in itself, but that the truth of a proposition must be judged in relation with the historical and linguistic referentiality of the discourse, it is clear that for Averroes comprehension does mean to convey linguistically the metaphysical content of a proposition. Averroes is persuaded that the flexibility of language adheres perfectly to the different phenomenologies of Being.⁴⁶ The language displays Being, *puts it forward*, “discloses” it. A perfect identity is supposed to exist between thought, being and language: thought thinks Being and language displays correctly being in different forms along with the different kinds of languages used by individuals. Every time we speak significantly, we speak of Being and consequently of truth; and we have to be silent on everything we are not able to speak of.

In order to explain this assertion, we have to look primarily at the hermeneutical link between the interpreter and the interpreted text. Averroes establishes rigorously the characteristics of the interpreter and the interpreted text in the hermeneutical circle he describes. We must remember, first of all, that in the *Decisive Treatise* he distinguished among three classes of human people: the masses, the theologians and the philosophers, each with their own kind of language: rhetorical, dialectical and demonstrative. All give their consent (*taṣdiq*) to truth through language (see *infra* p. 80–81. Averroes draws this distinction in many places. For example: “in connection with religious Law, men are divided in three groups: the first, which the interpretation does not fit to at all, consists of the greatest majority of people, which is suited for rhetorical argumentation. No man gifted with intellect may refuse to consent to this kind of argumentations. The second group is that which benefits of dialectic interpretation: and dialectic, one becomes either by nature or by nature and education. The third group is that of true interpretation: they are the demonstrative people, who are such out of their natural disposition or out of training in the art of philosophy. The interpretation this latter group suggests must not be communicated to the dialectic, nor to the masses” (see *infra* pp. 109–110).

Let us consider the characteristics of the interpreter:

⁴⁶ Leaman 1988, pp. 194–196.

- If the masses are the interpreters, the hermeneutical circle does not work. For the language of the masses is not fitted for interpretation: they are either confined to the literality of the text or remain satisfied with the rhetorical images that lose touch with true being. The language of the masses does not express false propositions, because they predicate being to a degree through rhetorical images; but their comprehension is only apparent rather than genuine. Thus, the masses believe that Paradise is a luxuriant garden with rivers and handsome girls.
- If the theologians are the interpreters, the hermeneutical circle works only partially. For the theologians try to interpret, but the inaccuracy of their language leads them to erroneous and ungrounded conclusions, so that the risk of *kufṛ* is always great.
- Only with the philosophers does the hermeneutical circle work properly. For interpretation is a duty for the philosopher and the accuracy and exactness of their demonstrative language leads to a real and conclusive definition of being with a perfect correspondence between being and language—a correspondence the masses and the theologians only touched upon.

Now, we have to consider the characteristics of what is to be interpreted, the Qurʾān. There is a famous and fundamental verse that has been object of infinite hermeneutical inquiries. The verse Q. 3:7 runs: “It is He who sent down upon thee the Book, wherein are verses clear (*muhkamāt*) that are the Mother of the Book (*ummu’l-kitāb*), and other ambiguous (*mutaṣabihāt*). As for those in whose hearts is swerving, they follow the ambiguous part, desiring dissension (*fitna*), and desiring its interpretation; and no-one knows its interpretation save only God and those firmly rooted in knowledge (*al-rāsikhūn fī’l-‘ilm*) say: “We believe in it; all is from our Lord”” (Arberry’s translation with a couple of emendations).

The issue of which are the clear or firm verses and which the ambiguous ones has been disputed for a long time by Islamic *mufas-sirūn*; but the solution of the problem is not at stake here. We are interested in Averroes. Undoubtedly Averroes considered clear and firm the verses that can be withdrawn from any interpretative uncertainty. For instance, the verses declaring the unity and oneness

or the existence of God, or the verses attesting to the existence of Paradise and Hell. And so on. Their literal meaning cannot be subject to any allegorical interpretation because they express truths that must be accepted by all humanity. On the other hand, undoubtedly Averroes considered “ambiguous”, for instance, the verses describing God in an anthropomorphic way or the verses describing Paradise as a “physical” garden with rivers and beautiful girls or the verses regarding theodicy.⁴⁷ Hermeneutical inquiry (*ta’wīl*) must be applied *only* by philosophers and *only* on these ambiguous expressions, a Almohad/ Zāhirite attitude as it were. All men and women have to give their consent to the truths of faith, the masses, theologians and philosophers alike; the real meaning of the ambiguous verses has to be explained by philosophical hermeneutics only, because rhetoric and dialectic ones leave their followers unprotected in front of the danger of *kufṛ*, unbelief.⁴⁸

Averroes sets up four classes of methods to study religion; four ways to undertake hermeneutics:

One of them occurs where the method is common, yet specialized in two respects: i.e. where it is certain in its concepts and judgments, in spite of being rhetorical or dialectical. These syllogisms are those whose premises, in spite of being based on accepted ideas or on opinions, are accidentally certain, and whose conclusions are accidentally to be taken in their direct

⁴⁷ See for example the *Disclosure*, translated by I. Najjar in Averroes 2001, p. 116, where we read that we cannot take the verses regarding the justice or injustice of God at their face value.

⁴⁸ Again in the *Disclosure*, Averroes writes that “I decided to inquire in this book into those external dogmas which religion intended the public to uphold and to investigate in all this, to the degree to which my energy and capability permit, the intention of the Lawgiver. [...] [The theological sects] have entertained diverse beliefs about God and distorted the apparent meaning of many statements of Scripture with interpretations applied to such beliefs, claiming that these interpretations constitute the original religion that all people were meant to uphold. [...] However, if all such beliefs were compared and examined with the intent of religion, it would appear that most of them are novel statements and heretical interpretations” (translation cited, p. 17).

meaning without symbolization.⁴⁹ Scriptural texts of this class have no allegorical interpretations, and anyone who denies them or interprets them allegorically is an unbeliever.

The second class occurs where the premises, in spite of being based on accepted ideas or opinions, are certain, and where the conclusions are symbols for the things which it was intended to conclude. [Texts of] this [class], i.e. their conclusions, admit of allegorical interpretation.

The third is the reverse of this: it occurs where the conclusions are the very things which it was intended to conclude, while the premises are based on accepted ideas or on opinions without being accidentally certain.⁵⁰ [Texts of] this [class] also, i.e. their conclusions, do not admit of allegorical interpretation, but their premises may do so.

The fourth [class] occurs where the premises are based on accepted ideas or opinions, without being accidentally certain, and where the conclusions are symbols for what it was intended to conclude. In these cases, the duty of the élite is to inter-

⁴⁹ Geoffroy (Averroes 1996) translates: “Ces syllogismes sont ceux dont les prémisses, tout en étant [seulement] communément admises, ou encore opinatives, sont certaines accidentellement, et dont les conclusions, accidentellement, signifient au propre et non symboliquement” (p. 153). The term “accidentally” or “accidentellement” could be ambiguous, and, in my view, Hourani and Geoffroy connote the Arab verb *‘arada* “ideologically”, from which the term *‘arad* derives, with the meaning of “accident”. But the verb has also the meaning of “occur”, “become visible”. Butterworth translates: “These syllogisms are the ones whose premises happen to be certain, even though they are generally accepted or suppositional, and whose conclusions happen to be matters taken in themselves rather than as likenesses” (pp. 24–25).

⁵⁰ Geoffroy (Averroes 1996) translates: “où les prémisses sont communément admises ou opinatives sans être accidentellement certaines” (p. 155), Butterworth (Averroes 2001): “the premises are generally accepted or suppositional without happening to be certain” (p. 25).

pret them allegorically, while the duty of the masses is to take them in their apparent meaning.⁵¹

Briefly:

- From certain premises to certain conclusions: no allegorical interpretation is admitted. Among this kind of syllogism, we count the arguments developed on the firm and clear verses of the Holy Text. Consent is obligatory for philosophers and the masses alike.
- From certain premises to symbolical conclusions that can undergo allegorical interpretation.
- From widely believed but not certain premises (that can undergo allegorical interpretation) to certain conclusions.
- From widely believed but not certain premises to symbolical conclusions. In this case, the allegorical interpretation is obligatory for the philosophers while the masses must give their assent to the literal meaning.

Unfortunately, Averroes offers no example of the application of these rules.

Hence derives the famous Averroist doctrine, referred to several times in the *Decisive Treatise*, of the three classes of men: the masses, satisfied with likely fairy tales, rhetorical images and which do not need any interpretation overreaching the literal sense of Scriptures; the theologians, who stop at the dialectic level of the meeting-clashing of opinions and do not look deeply into the meanings lying inside the revelations; the philosophers and the real knowers, who acquiesce only after having formulated a demonstrative, rationally organised evidence.

Each of these classes gives religious truths an obligatory consent, binding yet proportionate to their faculties and capacities to act and comprehend. It is, in a certain way, a sociological criterion to adhere to truth: education, individual attitude, living conditions facilitate or hinder the psycho-intellectual evolution of the single individual, which can stop at the lowest stadium of ignorance or

⁵¹ Here I report Hourani's translation (Averroes 1976, pp. 64–65), for a possible confrontation with my own at page 107–108 *infra*. Butterworth's translation in Averroes 2001, pp. 24–25.

elevate itself to the contemplative level of philosophical knowledge.⁵²

This kernel of Averroes' argument must now be discussed under a different perspective.

First of all, generally speaking, Averroes shares the well-known principle in the history of hermeneutics, and in Zāhirite doctrine, that *in claris non fit interpretatio*. If the text is ostensive and obvious, the text itself attests its meaning in the light of the rules of grammar and language. The texts speak straightforwardly to the interpreter. This is the reason why the philosopher must accept literally, like the masses, the expressions of the Qur'ān that do not lead to any interpretative issues: for instance, as we saw, that God is one, that He has attributes, that He will judge on the Last Day, that Paradise and Hell exist. If the text is ambiguous, the *ta'wīl* begins to work and the hermeneutical circle goes into operation. In this case, it is the interpreter who attests and justifies the meaning of the text by his/her independent reasoning (*iğtihād*). This is the reason why the philosopher must allegorize the ambiguous expressions of the Qur'ān, for instance concerning the face or the hands of God, the justice of God, the real nature of Paradise and Hell, if they are respectively a garden and a furnace or if they are spiritual abodes. We can reach *iğmā'* or consensus on practical issues, Averroes says, but not on theoretical issues. And this is because men dispose of the Law and of the Qur'ān whose moral and ethical verses are clear and firm and are beyond any possible allegory. On the contrary *iğmā'* is not viable in theoretical issues because, on the one hand, the languages (rhetorical, dialectical and demonstrative) expressing the unique truth have different degrees of obligation; and, on the other hand, because often the Qur'ān covers under ambiguous images those deep metaphysical truths only the philosophers are able to unveil through hermeneutics and demonstration.

Secondly, Averroes puts forward an original and personal reading of Q. 3:7. He focuses on the expression "the firmly rooted in knowledge". It is well known that a different reading of the verse is possible. A fideistic reading is possible if we mean that only God is in possession of the true interpretation; a rationalistic reading is

⁵² See Campanini 1988.

possible if we mean that those firmly rooted in knowledge are in possession of the true interpretation along with God. "Orthodox" Muslim theology accepted the first reading: the great Qur'ānic commentator al-Ṭabarī denied absolutely that human beings can share the knowledge of God. The second reading is otherwise taken up by Shiite theology where at least 'Alī and the *imams* are able to interpret the hidden meaning of religion and religious sciences.⁵³

While he was not a Shiite, Averroes supported the second reading of the verse. In the *Decisive Treatise*, for instance, he writes: "it is not possible to obtain a generalised consent on (theological) questions like those just mentioned, since, as it was handed down by many of the first Muslims and by others yet, interpretations must not be formulated but for those who are experienced with them, hence well-trained in science. Indeed, we want to set a full stop after the Highest's words, 'men of solid science...'" (see *infra* p. 89). For the philosophers are inheritors of the prophets: as Galileo Galilei would say, the philosophers do not know all the propositions that are infinite and only God has infinite knowledge, but they know the propositions they are able to understand with the same clarity and exactness of God.

The philosophers can carry on the duties and tasks they are obliged to comply by reason through the "allegorical interpretation" (*ta'wil*) of the Holy Text. Averroes' idea of *ta'wil* is completely different from that of the Shiite, however. Although both aim to go beyond the literal meaning of the text, the Shiite *ta'wil* is a "spiritual hermeneutics", as Henry Corbin put it, linked to an esoteric perception of religion and of the same structure of the universe. On the contrary, Averroes thinks that *ta'wil* means "to transport the argumentation from a real to a metaphorical plane" (*min al-dalāla al-ḥaqīqīyya ilā al-dalāla al-mağāzīyya*)—without, by this, derogating from Arabic linguistic standards in the use of metaphors—, so as to define something either with a synonym or referring to its cause or its effect or to something else that might be comparable thereto,

⁵³ See the articles of J. McAuliffe (*Qurānic Hermeneutics: the Views of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr*) and of M. Ayoub (*The Speaking Qur'an and the Silent Qur'an: a Study of the Principles and Development of Imāmi Shī'ī Tafsīr*), in A. Rippin 1988.

or finally to all those peculiarities that can be found in the diverse kinds of metaphorical discourse. The linguistic and semiotical character of the interpretation is predominant in Averroes, while the spiritual and esoteric character is characteristic of the Shiites.

Averroes settles carefully the rules of *ta'wil*. First of all, he obviously maintains that, if philosophical propositions are not provided in Scripture or the theological propositions are not provided in philosophy, no contradiction is possible. But, "real being is either mentioned or omitted in the Scriptures. If it is omitted, there is no contradiction (between religion and philosophy), because that case would be identical to the jurist who, not finding some legal principle in the Scriptures, must deduce it by analogical way. If, on the contrary, religious texts mention them, one of the two occurs: either the apparent sense of the philosophical conclusion agrees with or it contrasts with those texts. If it agrees, there is no problem. Yet if it contrasts, the necessity of an allegorical interpretation of the Scriptures arises"(see *infra* p. 81). Put differently, if the simple reading of the text does not accord with the philosophical conclusions, the text that ought to be subjected to allegorisation is the religious. This claim can convey the false presupposition that for Averroes in philosophy there is more truth than in religion and that philosophy can do without religion, while religion cannot do without philosophy. Surely, Averroes' idea was different: the statement that truth does not contradict truth was absolutely sincere. The point is that the concept of truth consists in the reciprocal congruence of the manifold ways by which our languages describe reality. Being, therefore, is shown by language and understood through language. Now, the language of philosophy is more coherent and compelling than theological or juridical language, so that, if two propositions contrast with each other, it is the weakest formulation (the theological-juridical) that needs interpretation in order to come nearer to the stronger formulation (the philosophical). Despite this process, Being does not depart from its ontological necessity; simply, Being unveils itself in language and we can have, literally, *αληθεια* of it, i.e. *unhiddenness* or disclosure.⁵⁴ Thus, if we recognize—hermeneutically—that any knowledge of the truth has an es-

⁵⁴ See for instance M. Heidegger 1998, p. 230.

entially interpretative character,⁵⁵ Averroes' doctrine enables us to attain a plurality of approaches to Being through language without Being losing its ontological basis. This happens because truth does not contradict truth, that is there exists a common ground for truths, a noumenon of truth, as it were, although we do not know its essence. Is it God or something else? God is beyond physical reality however.

It might seem then, at this point, that Averroes' discourse develops with admirable logical consequence; but it is our task, on the contrary, to show that it raises more problems than it solves. We can, first of all, formulate three questions:

- If the three classes give a different consent to truth, in what sense is said truth "unique"? In other words: is the uniqueness of truth a mere formal question or does it point at an authentic convergence in contents?
- By which tool is it possible to establish that philosophical truth is more solid and suited to the mind than the dialectic and/or rhetorical one?
- Are truth, reality and certainty equivalent terms? Or rather: is what is real, also true, and what is true, also certain?

I shall here try and answer these questions of huge philosophical relevance as homogeneously as possible.

The most recent and well-informed criticism correctly speaks of a global realism of Averroes' philosophical conception; the theorisation of the relationship between thought and being shows that thought mirror-like reflects the objective being of reality (it is here a position of Aristotelian origin). It is not difficult to find conclusive reference in Averroes' works. In the *Incoherence of the incoherence*, for instance, we read: "true knowledge consists of the conformity to what exists".⁵⁶ In the *Great Commentary to Aristotle's metaphysics* (or *Tafsir mā ba'd al-Ṭabīʿa*), Averroes writes that "looking for persuasive argumentations without considering whether they correspond to reality or they don't, gives way to false and misleading beliefs".⁵⁷

⁵⁵ See G. Vattimo 2002.

⁵⁶ Averroes 1930, p. 463 (transl. Averroes 1997, p. 432).

⁵⁷ Averroes 1984, p. 57.

Cruz Hernandez offers a Platonic-grained interpretation of this position of Averroes: “No demonstration is possible if it does not lean on the ontologic structure of reality, starting from the fundamental prerequisite of the non-contradiction principle. What allows nature’s formal reality to convert into the formal reality of the human intellect is the relationship of fundamental consubstantiality existing between the ontic world and the gnosiological”.⁵⁸ According to Cruz, “human and philosophical knowledge and God’s natural enacted Law are one and the same reality: the rational structure supporting the whole world of being”.⁵⁹

Indeed, in the *Decisive Treatise* and in the “Appendix” or *Damima*, Averroes repeats several times that philosophy is the science of things as they are and for what they are; it is the science of existing, as such.⁶⁰ And it is obvious that thought, in order to know things in their most authentic and actual reality, cannot but be substantially and epistemologically consistent with such reality⁶¹ (see *infra*, pp. 121ff., concerning the question of divine knowledge of details). Nevertheless, when defending the uniqueness of truth beside the multitude of the consent types, Averroes risks undermining the consistence of thought and being, or even becoming entangled in statements, if not contradictory, at least of a surprising nature in their duplicity.

Let us consider the highly interesting discussion upon the eternity of the world (cf. *infra*, pp. 93–97). After reading it, a number of quite peculiar conclusions can be drawn:

- philosophers and theologians would state the same thing saying, the former that the world is eternal; the latter that the

⁵⁸ Cruz Hernandez 1985, II, p. 74. and cf. Cruz Hernandez 1966.

⁵⁹ Cruz Hernandez 1979, p. 24. The same author (Cruz Hernandez 1986, p. 102) notes that for Averroes “the real existence of universals in our intellect is the evidence of the certainty that authentic reality is the object of our knowledge”.

⁶⁰ But see Jolivet’s clarification 1982, pp. 227–230.

⁶¹ Leaman 1988, p. 100, writes: “The formal principles making up the world shape also our particular sensitive data, so as to ensure a certain metaphysical certainty about truth and the accuracy of knowledge. This certainty derives from the identity of active intellect and material intellect”.

world has been created: indeed, the world is neither created nor uncreated, but rather a middle kind, as it is subject to processes of generation and corruption in the individual living beings that make it up, while, globally, it exists “coeternally” to God,⁶² although it is his creative effect;

- although philosophy concludes in the same way as the Qur’ān, Qu’rānic theories may not avoid undergoing a hermeneutic, allegorical but not only, interpretation, in order to be properly understood: otherwise, how could we account for the verses claiming that God did not exist alone at the beginning of time (the Throne and the “smoke” or substrate did exist with Him), nor will he exist alone after the Universal Judgment (souls are *a parte post* immortal)?
- the necessity of a hermeneutic reading of the Qur’ān may appear contradictory, though, to the fact that Qu’rānic theological principles are the object of *faith truths*, truths the consent to which is obligatory, with no arguing, even by philosophers. Of course, Averroes might say that the qualifying point is that philosophers grant their consent not so much to the *letter* of the Qur’ān, but rather to its “esoteric”, allegorical or symbolical or purely rational meaning. Yet in that case, how should we account for his statement that philosophers are closest to Qu’rānic truth than theologians, since the two ways to knowledge give the same result and religion is more universal than philosophy?

How are these oscillations justifiable? It is worthwhile to perform an epistemological *excursus*. The starting points may be different; yet a passage of the *Incoherence of the incoherence* is particularly interesting. To al-Ġazālī’s objection that tends to void logical necessity of objective meaning: “If you expect to know something by necessity, why don’t your adversaries share the same certainty with

⁶² The principle is of Neoplatonic origin and gets to Averroes through Avicenna: God cannot but create *ab aeterno* and enact the possibles, if they are truly possible, since, otherwise, possibles would become impossibles. Indeed, all that can exist must sooner or later exist (cf. Leaman 2002, chapt. I; Campanini 2004). For other suggestions, see note 45 to the text.

you?”, Averroes can answer in a “Popperian” fashion: there exists no demonstration that may contradict something which is known absolutely and certainly, since, should there exist one, it would mean that a proposition has been taken for certain without it being so in reality.⁶³ As a matter of fact, Averroes here admits the non-falsifiability of knowledge obtained through demonstration, not its verifiability. And still: is what is absolutely and certainly known also “real”? This is the true difficulty.

A statement like the following does not solve the problem:

Since the problems that are tackled in this book [the Lambda book in the *Commentary to Aristotle's Metaphysics*] are of two kinds, those concerning metaphysics and those concerning the objects of research metaphysics implies, it is convenient, first of all, engaging in the apodictic study of this science, to start with knowing the solution to the problems, because it is the knowledge of the problems that makes the apodictic study of science possible; and this sort of study better clarifies all the discipline called philosophy. [Aristotle] thinks thus that one must start with solving the problems implied by the study of that discipline. And since speculation is not valid if not after establishing propositions serving as assumption, [Aristotle] believes that it is necessary before all to speak of those refusing these propositions and deny speculation. [...] His purpose is that statement and denial are irreconcilable, because such [i.e. the non contradiction principle] is the foundation of speculation; so that those refusing it may neither argue nor put forth a proposition that is true.⁶⁴

Averroes' discourse keeps itself on a purely logical level: the validity of the study of metaphysics depends on the cogency of apodictic argumentation, not on its reference to a more or less objective reality, external to thought. It does not come as a surprise that scholars such as ʿĀtef al-ʿIrāqī formulate an interpretation of Averroes' rationality playing within a logical framework: science is eminently intellectual; demonstration is the source of certain

⁶³ Averroes 1930, p. 15 (transl. Averroes 1997, p. 86).

⁶⁴ Averroes 1984. pp. 35–36.

knowledge and the non-contradiction principle leads to the foundation of a “true science” (*‘ilm ḥaqīqī*); science concerns only the universal abstract, never the concrete detail.⁶⁵

It is obvious that, starting from the prerequisite that the concept can but reflect the existing, Averroes must answer positively as to whether what is certain is also real.⁶⁶ Yet, as soon as he tries to connect religion and philosophy, the Arab thinker can but apply this realistic solution with great difficulty. As far as the problem we hinted at is concerned, that of the eternity of the world, the absolute certainty of the philosophical demonstration (the world is eternal) must be considered identical to faith’s opposite dictate (the world has been created). So, ironically, the following propositions result semantically and epistemologically equivalent: (p) the world is real and it has been created; (p₁) the thought world is eternal. In order to reach such an equivalence, a linguistic game regarding the *literal* expressions in the Qur’ān is necessary, by which the two statements, that God did not exist in absolute aloneness before creating the world and that the world shall exist indefinitely in the future, become simultaneously theological truths and the confirmation to philosophical apodixis. I should say that it would be easy, for a traditionalist theologian, to respond that the Qur’ān *sic et simpliciter* reiterates that God created the world from nothing: “It is He who creates at the beginning and then the created renews” (Q. 30:27); “It is He who produces the first creation and re-creates it alive after death” (Q. 27:64)!

⁶⁵ Trāqī 1984, pp. 74–76.

⁶⁶ In the *Incoherence of the incoherence*, Averroes remarks, on the one hand, that “the [human] intellect is nothing but the perception of the order and the arrangement of existing things” (Averroes 1930, p. 339; transl. Averroes 1997, p. 334), and, on the other, that “the certain science (*‘ilm yaqīnī*) is the knowledge of the thing as it is in itself” (Averroes 1930, p. 531; transl. Averroes 1997, p. 489). Cf. Cruz Hernandez 1985, II, p. 75: “inasmuch substance is being, this same being, translated from an ontologic plane to a gnosiologic one, serves as a guarantee to the certainty of knowledge, which is the cause of the demonstration and the definition of all things. [...] What is true, then, consists of adjusting the contents of the intellectual operation to the existing reality outside the intellect”.

Many have correctly drawn attention to the role that language plays in the construction of Averroes' thought.⁶⁷ Oliver Leaman, for instance, insisting on Averroes' empirical realism, remarked that "the appropriate use of terms is obtained thanks to their connection with the context whence they derive their meaning, a context in its turn rigorously justified by the way the world works".⁶⁸ According to Leaman, "the multiplicity of the points of view from which men look upon facts is represented by the multiplicity of the languages useful to characterise the whole *continuum* of opinions, moving from the demonstrative to the poetic and rhetoric position". Language being an extremely flexible and adjustable instrument, the conflict between the multiple and contrasting options of knowledge "is reduced to the emphasis with which the various aspects of a reality are described, that is the way in which the world truly is". Apparently contradictory perspectives "result as acceptable as they are different ways to be one single reality".⁶⁹

Leaman's conclusion is sharable obviously, but the dilemma, at least as far as the *Decisive Treatise* and ontology are concerned, would not be solved completely, because the contradiction is inherent to the very attempt by Averroes to admit one single "truth", where truth is determined by the subjective attitude of those who know and by their different ways to express it linguistically. We must then go further and radicalise the perspective. As a point of fact, in my opinion, in the *Decisive Treatise* it is stated that what the Qur'ān offers is not a universal truth, but only a certainty guaranteed by the objective literal meaning of the verses and predicated on different linguistic levels. The philosopher is obliged to overcome the rhetorical *niveau* to draw on demonstrative certainty; the authentic philosophy, though, cannot offer truths, but rather discourses on truth, which are certain but not obligatorily consistent with the objective reality of facts.

This is precisely the central knot: reality is predicated on a linguistic level and the concept of truth consists of the mutual con-

⁶⁷ See already Allard 1952–1954, partially translated (pp. 153–162) and commented on (pp. 24–25 and 37) in Campanini 1989.

⁶⁸ Leaman 1988, p. 41.

⁶⁹ Ibidem, pp. 195–196.

sistence of the different linguistic expressions by which we describe reality. Reality is interpretative. Being is thus manifested in language, yet not limited to it. Now, for Averroes the language of philosophy is more consistent and binding than the theological or religious one; therefore, as we have seen, if two linguistic expressions are in contrast with each other, it is evident that the weaker formulation of the two (the theologic-religious one) will need a hermeneutic interpretation that manages to lift it further to a higher and more convincing level and stronger formulation (the philosophical one). And all this without being derogating from its ontologic necessity: it simply manifests itself, *gives* itself, in three different language registers, the philosophical one (which is demonstrative and apodictic), the theological-religious one (which is dialectic) and the rhetoric-story-telling one (simplifying concepts and making them available to a wider public, the masses). So, if we admit—hermeneutically—that all knowledge of what is true has an essentially interpretative nature, Averroes' doctrine allows to achieve a plurality of approaches to being through language, without the very being losing its characterisation and its ontological bases, since what is True cannot contrast with what is True, that is, there exists a common foundation to Truth.

From Gauthier's position, who believed religious truth to be subordinate, a kind of younger sister, to philosophical truth, although he denied the duplicity of truth in Averroes,⁷⁰ to the concordism of certain contemporary Arab thinkers—like Ḥasan Ḥanafī, who identifies in the agreement between tradition and intellectual research a specific feature of Islamic thought, to the point that he makes a prophet out of the philosopher—,⁷¹ all along this route, Averroes's position is indicated as potentially *univoque*, while it is actually sufficiently nuanced to avoid a homogeneous interpretation.

Gauthier would have been right to speak of Averroes' rationalism without reserve if truth were really unique, and if the way men look at reality were always wholly consistent with such truth.

⁷⁰ Gauthier 1909, pp. 147–148; and Gauthier 1948, pp. 37–38 and 41.

⁷¹ Hanafī 1982, p. 162 and 171.

Yet Averroes was not at all a rationalist in the sense that he reduced any kind of knowledge to an intellectual activity grasping being in an *univoque* manner.⁷² Religion and prophecy possess with him just as central a value: “the only way to know God’s will... is prophecy”, states Averroes in the *Commentary on Plato’s Republic*;⁷³ “all that exists in the world is subject to divine wisdom and our intellects are often inferior to the comprehension of a great part thereof”, he repeats in the *Incoherence of the incoherence*.⁷⁴ And instances could be multiplied.

In the “Appendix” to the *Decisive Treatise* or *Ḍamima*, when discussing the very delicate problem of God’s knowledge, Averroes does not accept the theological conclusion by which objects would *a priori* be in God’s mind according to a form of existence identical to the one they will have when they are created; neither does he accept the philosophical and Aristotelian position by which things are known as such only at the moment when they come into existence. Concerning God, in fact, this would require a kind of *a posteriori* knowledge differing from that of *a priori*, because objects known *after* their coming into existence are multiple and individualised and not ideas reducible to one single archetype. In a certainly not rigorously rationalistic manner, Averroes concludes, then, that the only possible solution is to admit in God a capacity for knowledge totally different from the human one, because God, knowing, creates, while man, knowing, simply receives in his mind reflected images of the current way of existent reality. The mistake is determined due to an improper confusion of the human plane and the divine plane, as the eternal being of the world in its whole was arbitrarily (?) confused with the generability and corruptibility of the single existing individuals.

⁷² Cf. Badawī 1972, II, pp. 785–789 translated in Campanini 1989. But also Alonso 1947, p. 118: “The *Faṣl* [i.e. the *Decisive Treatise*] in itself is contrary to rationalism”.

⁷³ Averroes 1956, p. 185.

⁷⁴ Averroes 1930, p. 413 (transl. Averroes 1997, p. 533).

V. A SOCIOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE

Given these prerequisites, it is truly surprising that Averroes did not manage to discriminate sharply (as Avicenna on the contrary did) an esoteric or even Gnostic meaning of science and knowledge from an exoteric one. As a matter of fact, claiming, on the one hand, that religion addresses most of all the majority and the masses, and, on the other, that the true understanding of religious truth is to be achieved only through philosophy and the demonstrative method, Averroes would seem to suggest that the revealed and rhetorical aspect of faith is useless for men of science, who reach levels of wisdom which are epistemologically self-sufficient.

Yet he actually reverses the perspective, from gnosiologic to sociologic: hence the doctrine of the three classes of men is born. In order to solve the problem of the ambiguity or at least plurality of truth, Averroes discovers the crowbar of the multiplicity of certainties (and of consents) reached through language. Sociologically, therefore, truth is not the same for everyone; it cannot suit everyone. Children are told fairy tales; we must try to teach adults moral precepts. Analogously, common people will be satisfied with Qur'ānic story-telling; whereas the philosopher—though accepting the theological dogmas that the Qur'ān includes one way or the other—will have to elevate himself to apodictic demonstration.

The problem that has to be faced now, and which Averroes addresses extensively in the *Decisive Treatise*, is whether communication is possible between the two planes of certainty: between the story-telling-rhetorical one of the common people and the theoretical-demonstrative one of the philosophers. Averroes' answer is absolutely negative; on the contrary, he particularly insists on the necessity of keeping common people far enough from philosophy. The most unforgivable crime is that of those who try to formulate hypotheses and propositions in fields of study wherein they are incompetent: Averroes goes so far as to define them sinners or unbelievers. Corruption derives as much from an incorrect use of the tools of knowledge as from the disorientation falling upon those

who, having misused knowledge, no longer understand where truth lies.⁷⁵

In the *Commentary on Plato's Republic*,⁷⁶ Averroes takes up again, attributing the origin thereof to Plato himself, the theory of the difference between the philosophers' superior and the common people's inferior knowledge, and of the incompatibility of the two planes:

We say that there are two ways by which the virtues in general are brought about in the souls of political humans. One of them is to establish the opinions in their souls through rhetorical and poetical arguments. This is limited to the theoretical sciences presented to the multitude of humans, while the way by which the elect few learn the theoretical sciences are the true ways, as shall be stated later on. In teaching wisdom to the multitude, he [Plato] used the rhetorical and poetical ways because they [the multitude] are in this respect in one of two situations: either they can know them [the speculative truths] through demonstrative arguments, or they will not know them at all. The first [situation] is impossible [for the multitude]. The second is possible since it is fitting that everyone obtain as much of human perfection as is compatible with what is in his nature to obtain of this and with his preparation for it. Furthermore, their believing what they endeavour to believe of [what pertains to] knowledge of the first principle and the final

⁷⁵ Avicenna also believed that "as far as religious Law is concerned, it is important to stress one principle, namely that religions and the other Laws laid down by a prophet try to address the mass in its globality. It is obvious that the profoundest truths concerning the only real, that is, that there is a transcendent sublime Creator... cannot be communicated to the crowds. If indeed they had been communicated in their purest form to the Arab Bedouins or to the rough Jews, they would have immediately refused to believe in them, on the contrary they would have unanimously declared that they had been proposed to believe in a non-entity" (quot. in Leaman 1985, p. 145).

⁷⁶ Analysed in Badawī 1972, II, pp. 858–868.

cause, as far as it is in their nature to believe, is useful with regard to the other moral virtues and practical arts.⁷⁷

The doctrine of natural and social tendencies to embrace the one or the other level of knowledge and perfection is obviously used by Averroes to conclude that the management of the State falls only under the philosophers' competence, in compliance with the Platonic opinion. Those who are prohibited philosophy "shall stay on a level that they won't be able to overcome".⁷⁸ A difference in the way of social being is thus tightened up through philosophy, which eventually can but crystallise in a class and moral attitude difference, further and further down until the lowest level of beggars. In comparison to philosophers, whose supreme goal is contemplative life, "those who hang around at the corner of the street and are perpetually imperfect, are on the contrary eager [to enjoy] material life and are void of all dignity".⁷⁹ In this case, the truths of the common people are but a grotesque mimesis of the truths of philosophy, and they yield the implicit effect of taking the common people irreversibly farther and farther from the greatest attainable degree of certainty and truth; just like children who, in their games, try to imitate the world of adults, and reproduce but a faded and misshapen copy thereof.

In the *Decisive Treatise* it is said that common people must be kept apart from an unsuitable knowledge because knowing things that are not understood can bring about unbelief and might enhance mutual enmities and the rise of sects or parties rivalling each other (cf. *infra*, p. 115ff). It may be worthwhile to remark that the separation of the masses from knowledge and from the practice of knowledge has no "racist" follow-up in Averroes; it rather looks like a preventive measure of social control intended to avoid the standardisation of knowledge, which would be useless and vain anyway for a populace incapable of assimilating it, translates into a degradation of knowledge itself. The point is not, then, to defend an alleged knowledge esotericism, an initiated-only secrecy, but ra-

⁷⁷ Averroes 1974, pp. 10–11.

⁷⁸ Ibidem, p. 124.

⁷⁹ Ibidem, p. 139.

ther to avoid that, discussing incomprehensible problems, the crowds end up in uncontrollable political brawls or moving away from religion. There seems to be in Averroes the preoccupation of maintaining social balance and peace while philosophy—when it claims to state the “truth” and go beyond the literal sense of reality and of Scriptures—may become an instrument of subversion, representing either a universal awareness of the profound meanings of divine knowledge communicated to men, or a sinful deformation of such knowledge.

The famous statement in the *Incoherence of the incoherence* which we have quoted above, by which religions are “necessary constructions of civilisation” assumes a meaning of particular relevance, namely that religions are historical and social products useful to human sociability.⁸⁰ Since philosophy may not be spread with the common people so as not to run the risk of putting out a truth that might be misunderstood, religions perform the function of supplying the masses with generic and specific information about the necessary speculative truths. It is curious to note how, in the same passage, Averroes claims that the philosopher’s perfection is unattainable without the direct contact with the populace; yet this confirms the political value of all of Averroes’ discourse and the fact that philosophy itself cannot but be vain without a political foundation (just like Plato used to teach actually).⁸¹ We might deduce then

⁸⁰ Averroes 1930, pp. 581 (transl. Averroes 1997, pp. 533); cf. Campanini 1989, p. 33 (for the comment) and p. 98 (for the translation).

⁸¹ Rosenthal 1958, pp. 175–176: “Commenting on Aristotle’s statement that man is “political animal by nature”, Ibn Rushd says: “This means that is impossible for him to live without the state...”. he is equally emphatic in his detailed commentary on the *Republic*. While he is convinced that man can reach his highest perfection only in the ideal state, he insists that no man can live, let alone reach happiness and perfection, outside any kind of political association”. It is interesting also the following observation by Oliver Leaman 2002, p. 178: “Averroes uses the same sort of technique which Aristotle employed to combine social with intellectual virtues in his account of happiness, but in the case of the *ḥaylasūf* happiness is discussed in relation to religious and intellectual virtues. Averroes famously claimed that there is no difference between the aim of philosophy and the aim of religion. They both seek to secure happiness and truth.

that a sound political system must be grounded on a wise management by the scholars and on a substantial subordination to them of the masses. This is a fundamentally Platonic idea, reproachable of not being democratic, yet extremely realistic and fitted for the state's management. Averroes, even though for different reasons, shared al-Ġazālī's preoccupation for an excessive virulence of religious disputes, and was favourable to an appeasement of his contemporary society both from a religious and on a political point of view. As a matter of fact, the only effectively tolerant political system is one whose ideology founds philosophy's serenity and speculative coldness on the certain and solid truth of the *tawḥīd*, the Islamic Uniqueness and Oneness of God the Creator and Provider.

VI. AVERROES, THE DOUBLE TRUTH AND HIS HERITAGE

The *Decisive Treatise* was not known to the Medieval West. It is therefore useless to wonder if and how it might have affected the elaboration of the so-called theory of "double truth", the famous "Averroist" doctrine (but not by Averroes!) according to which religious and philosophical truth would be different, and even irreducible, *quasi sint duae contrariae*. However, because Averroes' presence and fortune in Western thought between the 13th and the 17th (or even the 18th) century were extremely wide and are by now an acknowledged fact, it is necessary to ponder upon the limitations and the boundaries of "Averroism" and whether they correspond to Averroes' "true" thought.

That Averroes' fortune in the West rests above all on his fame as commentator of Aristotle is as well-known and obvious a fact. In the light of this consolidated historiographic base, it is worthwhile remarking or reinstating that there is another aspect of his fame and influence more at issue: that of disbelief, obviously connected to his philosophy of religion. It may appear superfluous, yet

Religion permits anyone to attain these desirable ends, but philosophy is limited to a few people who are attuned to intellectual work. [...] the conclusion that Averroes wishes to draw, particularly in his *Decisive Treatise*, is that anyone may know how to act rightly by following the rules of Islam, and so the virtuous life is available to all regardless of their capacity for rational contemplation".

it is worth reminding that during the so-called Middle Ages, Giles of Rome accused him of ridiculing all religions, including the Islamic one; Petrarch, who we would call today “Islamophobic”, defined his thought as a “dangerous poison”; John Duns Scot stigmatised him as “cursed”.

This all patently and starkly contrasts with what Averroes actually was (as I have tried to demonstrate in detail up to here): a sincere Muslim engaged in a very specific political role. Certainly, as I defined him in a former monography of mine, Averroes was a militant intellectual⁸² and perhaps—once the time and place had changed—he acquired the reputation as a dangerous enemy of faith, especially with European Medieval and Renaissance philosophers, being an opponent and an “outsider”.

The Averroist or the “radical Aristotelian” was indeed an anti-conformist and liberal thinker, he was a provoker bordering with Atheism: he questioned consolidated truths, was ready to risk his life for “science”. As Maria Corti writes:

There is in the 13th century that group of thinkers [radical Aristotelians or Averroists, precisely] tending to question traditional knowledge, with an original and almost autonomous *vis speculativa*, there exists the perilous area of researchers’ thirsty for knowledge who superbly aspire to be *sapientes mundi* taking to the extremes the consequences of that intellectual *curiositas* which from Saint Augustine (*libido experiendi noscendique*) to Saint Bernard (*scire volunt ut sciant*) had set official culture ill at ease. [...] A valid witness [thereof] is borne by the texts of Aristotelian radicalism, dedicated, upon suggestion of the *Ethica Nicomachea*, precisely to the celebration of the allure and *nobilitas* of intellectual research at any cost, even at the cost of death.⁸³

Consistent with this formulation, I shall say that the actual importance of Averroes and “Averroisms”—from Siger of Brabant to Giordano Bruno and further—does not consist of sponsoring an absolute rationalism, *à la* Gauthier in Western historiography, or *à la* Jābirī in the Arab-Islamic one, neither of having transmitted doc-

⁸² M. Campanini 2007.

⁸³ M. Corti 2003, pp. 336–337.

trines as that of the intellects which have indeed enjoyed wide and universal credit and deeply affected the philosophical speculation at Universities, but rather of *having made philosophy the supreme science of perfection of the human intellect, the political instrument of protest and reformation*, as much of “normal” systems of thought (according to Kuhn’s terminology) and prevalent in a given age in a given place, as of the religious and institutional establishment which is often the keeper of those systems of thought. This is true, above all, for Averroes himself as far as the Almohad regime and the Malikite ‘*ulamā*’ of his time are concerned, as I have shown—be it noted, *far beyond his own intentions*.

At the base of this function performed by Averroes with Averroists, there is the doctrine of double truth, however it reached Latins, which is clearly formulated exactly in the *Decisive Treatise*. Above all, the perspective, well clear in Averroes, of the diversity and simultaneously of the convergence of philosophical research and religious revelation was recovered and radicalised by all those “radical Aristotelians” of the Renaissance that would structure their *quaestiones* on the double plane of the so-called “double truth”. One would be the truth grasped by the rational way; one, mostly opposed and contrasting thereto, would be the truth grasped by means of revelation or transcendent enlightenment. Now, it is a well-known fact that no philosopher embraced, in the sense we have just specified, a doctrine of “double truth”. However, many thinkers (like Pomponazzi) ensured their freedom of inquiry and etherodoxy of conclusions, through a conscious exploitation of the Averroist ambiguity, safeguarding their formal compliance with religion and the Church. Alessandro Achillini, to give just another example, another authoritative scholar who was active in Padua and Bologna at the end of the 15th century, could state according to reason that Aristotle’s Prime Mover had no reality (for the Averroist) but this: without the world caused and moved by it, the Prime Mover would be nothing. Therefore, God and the world make up an indissoluble pair: God is namely inherent in nature and, in a certain way, needed by it. Vice versa, according to faith, God is absolutely free and acts in full autonomy.⁸⁴ The Church intervened sev-

⁸⁴ See Nardi 1958.

eral times to condemn Aristotelian propositions re-read with the Arab commentator's "glasses": the most important ones were the condemnation by the bishop Stephen Tempier, in Paris in 1277,⁸⁵ targeting first of all Siger of Brabant, the "Gran Sigieri" of Dante's *Paradiso*, X, 136–138; and the condemnation by the bishop Pietro Barozzi, in Padua in 1489, targeting first of all Nicoletto Vernia and Agostino Nifo, two *celeberrimi philosophi* who were warned not to argue in favour of the unity of intellects.⁸⁶

Though absolutely taking into the due account the scholarly and refined distinctions of those who are convinced, with excellent arguments, that Averroism is a historiographic myth, that doctrines like that of the "double truth" were never really professed by anyone, that doctrines like that of the uniqueness of the possible intellect are equivocal and anyway not sufficient to create the "Averroist"⁸⁷—though absolutely taking all this into account, I keep on being convinced that, if they were hit several times with harsh reprimands and condemnations, "Averroists" must well have offered some reason to be run down on the basis of a shared and acknowledged theories.

It was in the light of "double truth" that Pietro Pomponazzi mocked the Church and religions, saying that they were "lousy" and "silly things" (*pidochiariae et nugae*), and he appears fully "Averroist" when he claims that the soul is mortal for philosophy, while it is immortal for the Church. We must believe the Church, he admits, yet reason demonstrates differently and it is reason that the philosopher must ultimately comply with. Pomponazzi wrote thus:

If some arguments seem to prove the soul's mortality, they are false and apparent, since the first light and the first truth

⁸⁵ Cf. Hissette 1977, Bianchi 1989. Bibliography about radical Aristotelianism is however conspicuous. Those interested should consult bibliographical repertoires of history of philosophy.

⁸⁶ Mahoney 2000.

⁸⁷ Latest, Bianchi 2015, pp. 71–109.

demonstrate the opposite. Yet if some seem to prove its immortality, they are true and clear, but not light and truth.⁸⁸

This observation leads me to consider Guido Giglioni's interesting analysis with caution:

Between the 15th and the 16th century a clear evolution takes place concerning the fate of Averroism in the universities of Northern Italy, an evolution whose main phases are faithfully recorded in the work by Nifo: the growing importance of Greek commentators—Alexander of Aphrodisias, Simplicius, Themistius, John Philoponus—in the determination of the meaning of the Aristotelian text; the influence of Platonic currents (especially Post-Plotinian Platonism but surely also Plato's dialogues), which contributed to supply a subtler insight of the notions of intellect and intelligibility; and finally the gradual definition of the theological political question in its modern terms and subsequent crisis of the *pax philosophica* within universities by which discussions concerning the nature of intelligibles could be made with a certain degree of freedom (God, the human soul and intellects). A gradual desertion of the double truth practice was the result. As soon as the interpretation of reality supplied by Aristotle was questioned in the very domain of reason, and the guarantor of the objectivity of such an interpretation—Averroes—was slowly overthrown from his role as the ultimate commentator, the precarious balance be-

⁸⁸ P. Pomponazzi 1954, chapter XV. In her dense (176 pages) introduction to the *De Fato, libero arbitrio et praedestinatione* by Pomponazzi, Vittoria Perrone Compagni (2004) acknowledges that even in that potentially dangerous work for traditional religion (one need to think of the doctrine of the religions' horoscope) the "Peretto", as in the *De Immortalitate animae*, bowed to the necessity to homage the Church, not so much out of an Anti-Christian spirit, as rather, even if *obtorto collo*, to ensure the free circulation of his book (whose eterodoxy he was evidently aware of). In any case, this does not demonstrate that he was not an "unbeliever", also because Perrone Compagni herself identifies his consonance with the highly "Averroist" thesis of the "political" character of religions, softened here too by the conviction that they are effects of the divine providence. Personally, I support the idea of a full etherodoxy of Pomponazzi.

tween the spheres of metaphysics and theology, which had been maintained more or less stable until the end of the 14th century, tilted irretrievably.⁸⁹

Pomponazzi does not fit into this grid, just like another “Averroist” outsider doesn’t—Giordano Bruno.⁹⁰ Both, one at the beginning and the other at the end of the 16th century, indeed went on professing a sort of double truth (even if the term is not popular or does not work, it is the substance that matters). The dissimulation technique employed by Bruno in his most sensitive and Anti-Christian works like the *Spaccio della bestia trionfante*, and then during the trial,⁹¹ it is ultimately nothing but a sophisticated form of double truth: admitting what was too evident to be denied; denying what might have been somehow camouflaged. Furthermore, the total triumph of Platonism over Aristotelianism imagined by Giglioni does not seem acceptable to me. On the one hand, precisely from the extreme *Cinquecento*, Jacopo Zabarella and Cesare Cremonini, very famous and influential Aristotelian professors in Padua, stayed rigorously Aristotelian, even though not Averroist.⁹²

After Giordano Bruno, Averroes’ “spirit” ends up being directly or indirectly embodied by other irregular thinkers, for in-

⁸⁹ G. Giglioni 2013, p.132.

⁹⁰ Bruno’s Averroism has been widely studied, but non exhausted. In my opinion, and regarding the issues treated in this book, Bruno’s Averroism consists of a peculiar vision of religion: according to Bruno, indeed, “The purpose of God in the Scriptures is to order men’s moral life. And doing so, God does not address wise men, who need no teaching since they can self-govern themselves, and well know what is good and what is evil. On the contrary, he addresses the populace, to the rough and ignorant crowds, who need to be governed and ruled. God’s essential objective is the communication of the necessary law so that men’s customs are good, civilisation develops, peoples live in peace, states increase their prosperity. The choice of the “character” of his word corresponds to this purpose. God speaks so that he might be comprehended by the “common people so that according to its way of understanding and speaking it may achieve to understand what is the most important” (M. Ciliberto 1990, p. 50).

⁹¹ Firpo 1993.

⁹² About the spread of Averroism in Italy, cf. Accademia dei Lincei 1979 for a first, rather wide and multifarious approach.

stance in that Baruch Spinoza who was ostracised as an unbeliever by the Dutch Jewish community. It is the spirit of unbelief, then, even without necessarily referring to Averroes, which feeds libertine and clandestine literature in the 1600s⁹³ and produces, among others, the *Treatise of the three impostors* variably attributed to Averroes, as a matter of fact, or to Spinoza. It is a route doing justice to the prejudice (not even too covertly racist) of Ernest Renan, a supporter of the total unresponsiveness of the Islamic mind to reason.

In a recent article, while drawing possible research routes, Filippo Mignini wrote that

The thesis [to be supported] is that not all of Averroes has suddenly disappeared from Western philosophy in the late Renaissance, in particular his theses concerning the link between cause and effect, the criticism of the world's creation *ex nihilo* or the impossibility to create new forms (so the eternity of the world), as well as the theses concerning the relationships between philosophy and religion and those connected to the soul and its mortality. If we were able to demonstrate, with the precision of historical and philosophical documents, that some of the decisive theses of Hobbes' and Spinoza's, but also of Bayle's and other thinkers' of the libertine area are deeply rooted in Averroes and in the Averroist tradition, and if the roots of radical Enlightenment of the XVIIIth century are to be found in these authors, in Spinoza and in the other mentioned authors of the XVIIth century, we might have found the missing link between Averroism and classical Enlightenment. Moreover, the association between Averroism and Enlightenment had already been made by Giovanni Gentile, who metaphorically indicated Averroism as "Medieval Aufklärung" Now we would dare to say something more: that it is possible to draw a line of continuity between Averroism and Enlightenment of the 1600–1700s through the mediation of some great philosophies of the 1600s [as] Spinoza's.⁹⁴

⁹³ See in general Paganini 2005.

⁹⁴ Mignini 2013, pp. 12–13.

I think that what has been said in this passage is useful precisely to find at least one of the missing links soldering the chain drawn by Mignini, namely Giordano Bruno. Beyond the proven connections to be drawn between Bruno and Spinoza, one might even proceed until libertine literature and Bayle, and even Toland,⁹⁵ whom Mignini does not remember. For now, it is useful to encounter Averroes again in the heart of sceptical and rationalistic Enlightenment, reading this vitriolic page by David Hume:

It must be allowed that the Roman Catholics are a very learned sect; and that no one communion, but that of the Church of England, can dispute their being the most learned of all the Christian churches. Yet Averroes, the famous Arabian, who, no doubt, had heard of the Egyptian superstitions, declares that, of all religions, the most absurd and nonsensical is that, whose votaries eat, after having created, their deity. I believe indeed that there is no tenet in all paganism, which would give so fair a scope to ridicule as this of the *real presence*: for it is so absurd, that it eludes the force of all arguments. There are even some pleasant stories of that kind, which, though somewhat profane, are commonly told by the Catholics themselves. One day, a priest, it is said, gave inadvertently, instead of the sacrament, a counter, which had by accident fallen among the holy wafers. The communicant waited patiently for some time, expecting it would dissolve on his tongue: But finding that it still remained entire, he took it off. *I wish*, he cried to the priest, *you have not committed some mistake: I wish you have not given me God Father: He is so hard and tough there is no swallowing him.*⁹⁶

Naturally, as should be obvious, there is (almost) nothing of the true Averroes in these words. Yet it is characteristic how his thought experienced a transformation, in the course of long centuries, on the grounds of the boldness his epigones derived from his works—comprehending them insofar as they benefited their projects, as for Bruno, or consciously exploiting them as for Pomponazzi—to criticise the *status quo*. Opinions have thus experienced

⁹⁵ Giuntini 1979.

⁹⁶ David Hume 1993, p. 167.

a metamorphosis which is informative in that it teaches us to make relative any certainty, both gnosiologic and historiographic.

Further and beyond the *Decisive Treatise*, the historical role played by Averroes' reflection on the relationship of philosophy with religion seems to be that to indirectly ensure a wide freedom of research and "scientific" depth. Even though perhaps many of the theories which were worked out in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance in the light of Averroes' works, and mostly of the Aristotelian *Commentaries*, would not have been subscribed by the Arab thinker, there is no doubt that he would have shared their epistemological goals. His personal orthodoxy is out of the question: it would be purely a pretext to claim that Averroes was not a good Muslim. Yet his wish to be objectively and wholly a philosopher is out of the question as well: and in order to reach that end, there was no other means but reading, glossing, understanding and spreading Aristotle, at least within the limited circle of researchers who had decided to dedicate their lives to philosophy.

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THE DECISIVE TREATISE ON THE CONNECTION BETWEEN ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS LAW AND PHILOSOPHY

[KITĀB FAṢL AL-MAQĀL]

The translation has been made from the critical text established and edited by M. ‘Amāra, *Faṣl al-Maqāl fī-mā bayna al-Ḥikma wa al-Ṣar‘a min al-Ittiṣāl*, Dār al-Ma‘ārif, Cairo 1972.

IN THE NAME OF GOD, THE MERCIFUL, WHO GIVES MERCY!
PRAISE BE TO GOD, LORD OF THE WORLDS! GOD’S PEACE AND
BLESSING BE ON OUR LORD MUḤAMMAD AND ON ALL HIS COM-
PANIONS AND MEMBERS OF HIS FAMILY.

The noblest and most excellent jurist, the fair judge, the very first among the learned Abū ‘l-Walīd Muḥammad Ibn Aḥmad Ibn Ruṣd—may God be satisfied with him and have mercy of him—says: Extolled be God with all the possible praises and be a prayer lifted for Muḥammad, His chosen and immaculate servant and messenger!

Then: the purpose of this writing is to investigate, from the point of view of religious Law, whether philosophical speculation and logical sciences are licit according to the *ṣar‘*¹ or prohibited or

¹ *Ṣar‘* or *ṣar‘a* is indeed the “religious Law”. In Averroes’ text, the term assumes different shades of meaning, therefore I translated it sometimes (confirmed by Hourani 1976, but the version is now widely accepted) also with “religion” or “Scripture”. This is justified by the fact that in the Semitic world, Arabic or Jewish in the same way, religion has more legalistic-juridical significance than gnostic-metaphysical, therefore “Law”

mandatory, both because they are commendable and because they are necessary.

I

And so we say: every philosophical activity is nothing but speculation upon existing beings,² and reflection upon how, through the consideration that they have been created, one manages to demonstrate the Creator:³ indeed, existing beings show to have a producer through the knowledge of having been produced.

and “religion” are factually often interchangeable.

² In this definition, Averroes seems to include both beings that have a separate existence (which, according to Aristotle, are dealt with by the “first philosophy” or “metaphysics”), and beings that exist in our real world (which are dealt with by the “second philosophy” or “physics”). The definition, after all, confirms the Averroistic realism that was stressed in the “Introduction” (cf. *supra*, p. 35–36). “What is dealt with by Ibn Rushd” Cruz Hernandez (1985, II, 55) writes “is what things are here and now... The actual entities have an inherent necessity to their tangible real existence. It is this that the philosopher should be interested in... From here derives that sort of mental allergy of Ibn Rushd for the famous distinctions codified by Ibn Sīnā [Avicenna] between “being merely possible *for itself* and necessary for other” and “being always and absolutely necessary *for itself*”.

³ Literally: “factor”, “producer”, “builder”; Arabic: *ṣāmiʿ*. The proof of the existence of a creator God starting from the existence of the creatures, that is of a First Cause starting with the derived effects, is a philosophical *topos* so well-known that it is not even worth to dwell on it. Instead, it is interesting to note how it is shared by Islamic thinkers, who are certainly not truly Aristotelian or rigorously philosophers. For example, the Neoplatonist (and gnostic) Ibn Ṭufayl: “The existence of the whole world was therefore only the one that came from its inclination to move by this Motor that is exempt from matter... Since the matter of everybody needed the form... the existence of the form did not occur but by the work of this Author... Everything that existed needed an Author” (Ibn Ṭufayl 1983, pp. 105–107). But also the theologian and spiritual crypto-philosopher al-Ġazālī, who, however, claimed a very strong philosophical base: “We affirm for principles of reasoning that every new thing, in order to be, must have a cause that produces it. The world is a new thing. Therefore, in order to be, it cannot but have a cause” (al-Ġazālī 1985, vol. I, p. 99; tr. in al-Ġazālī 1970a, p. 162).

Such knowledge concerning the production of things is more complete the more it allows a complete knowledge of Him who produced them. Religious Law authorises, indeed stimulates, the reflection upon what exists, so it is evident that the activity named (philosophy) is considered necessary by religious Law or, at least, it is recommended by it.

That religious Law calls to an intellectual inquiry on the existing beings and requires one (to attain) knowledge on them, it is clear from several verses of the Blessed and Exalted God's Book,⁴ among which, for instance, the following: "Reflect, O you who have eyes to see!" (Q. 59:2). This verse certifies the necessity of using intellectual reasoning, or rather, simultaneously, of intellectual reasoning and juridical-legal reasoning. The Most High also says: "Haven't they studied the realms of the heavens and earth and all the things created by God?" (Q. 7:185). This verse clearly induces speculation on existing beings as a whole. God the Most High has taught that among those who have been granted the honour of possessing science there is Abraham, in particular,—be unto him peace!—and indeed God said: "And so we showed Abraham the realms of the heavens and the earth, so that he be among those who are firmly convinced" (Q. 6:75). The Most High also stated: "Don't men then look at the camel, how it was created, and the sky, how it was lifted?" (Q. 88:17–18); and again: "Who... meditate upon the creation of the heavens and the earth" (Q. 3:191). And there exist innumerable other verses similar to these.

Having established that religious Law makes speculation and rational inquiry on existing beings mandatory, and since such inquiry consists of nothing but the deduction and derivation of the unknown from what is already known—and this is what has been called syllogism, or what you can get at by means of a syllogism—, it is also mandatory that we turn to the study of existing reality by means of rational reasoning.⁵ It is further evident that this type of

⁴ The Qur'ānic quotes are usually my own confronted with those of Ida Zilio Grandi in Italian (*Il Corano*, Mondadori, Milano 2010) and the English ones of Abdel Haleem and Arberry.

⁵ Arabic: *qiyās* ('*aql*). As the previous *ṣar*, also this word assumes in Averroes' text different shades of meaning: a) reasoning in general; b) syl-

analysis religious Law calls to and incites is the most perfect kind of study linked with the most perfect kind of reasoning, that is what is called “[apodictic] demonstration”.⁶

Since the Law leads to the knowledge of God Most High and of all existing creatures by means of demonstration, the best and absolutely most binding thing for anybody wanting to know the Blessed and Exalted God and the other existing beings though demonstration, is in the first place to make progress in the knowledge of the various sorts of demonstrations and their conditions, and then to know the difference between demonstrative, dialectic, rhetoric and erroneous reasoning. Yet this is not possible if first one does not know what reasoning is in a general sense, and how many types it is made up of, and what really is reasoning and what is not. And this in turn is not possible if first one does not know which are the parts making up reasoning—and especially the prerequisites and their distinctions. In conclusion: it is binding, for those who believe in religion and conform to it, choosing to speculate on the existing beings, that, before speculating, they get to know those things which, in connection with thought, perform the same function of the tools in connection with a practical activity.

Just as the jurist, from God’s command to work out a study on the *fiqh*, deduces the necessity of juridical knowledge and its varieties, and that of the determination of what is actually reasoning and what is not; just so is it mandatory for the learned, always complying with the (divine) command to speculate into existing beings, to deduce the necessity of rational knowledge and its varieties. Rather, the learned is even more bound to it since, if the jurist must deduce from God’s word: “reflect, O you who have eyes to see!”

logism; c) analogical deduction of a juridical kind. See Hourani 1976, p. 85, note 22; and for the various uses of the term also Abdou 1973, *sub indice*.

⁶ Arabic: *burhān*. Averroes distinguishes different kinds of demonstration (see Abdou 1973), mostly from direct Aristotelian derivation, like the demonstration *quia* (= why) and the one *propter quid* (= caused by what); to those are added “the demonstration that changes in relation to the position of its terms “ (cf. Abdou 1973, p. 501), and, naturally, the “rhetoric” demonstration (*ḥijābi*), the most appropriate to be understood by the common populace.

the necessity of rational juridical knowledge, how much more must the learned who wants to know God do so by rational intellectual knowledge!

And it makes no sense for somebody to object that the study carried out, according to rational reasoning, is an innovation to be blamed⁷ because there is no trace of it with the ancients,⁸ because juridical reasoning and its varieties were also born well after the time of the first Muslims, yet nobody considers them an innovation to be blamed! Therefore, it is necessary to reach the very same solution for rational reasoning—and the cause thereof is not to be mentioned here (once again). Moreover, the majority of the followers of our religion is well convinced (of accepting) rational reasoning, except a small sect of rough anthropomorphists,⁹ against whom it is possible to argue employing the Holy Texts.

Having then established that, according to religious Law, it is necessary to engage in the study of rational reasoning and its varieties, just as in the juridical sphere, it is evident that, if any of our predecessors did not deal with that reasoning, it is our duty to start. The successor must, to this end, ask for the help of those preceding him, so as to make his own knowledge more perfect. Now,

⁷ Arabic: *bid'a*. It is a technical term that indicates, usually, a doctrinal deviation compared to what is considered “orthodox”, or at least agreed on by the majority.

⁸ Arabic: “the first ones” (*al-awwal*). It means the very first companions and followers of the Prophet that, in the Muslim point of view, would have constituted the perfect society, and that represent the most veracious oral source of traditions (*ḥadīṭ*, plural *ahādīṭ*) of the behaviour (*sunna*) of Muḥammad. Obviously, the *sunna* of the Prophet should be binding for the ethical and social conduct of every authentic believer.

⁹ Arabic: *ḥaṣṣiyya*. They do not constitute a well and truly theological “school”, but they call themselves thus, those jurists or theologians who, starting from a rigorously literal interpretation of the Qurʾān, state that God has a body and that He is gifted with hands, eyes, etc., just like a man. Laoust 1983a, pp. 307–308, mentions among the main *ḥaṣṣiyya* Dāwūd al-Zāhirī (i.e. the “literalist”), in the critique of the Shiite theologian al-Hillī. Many exponents of the Ḥanbalite school of Law and theology have had strong anthropomorphic tendencies, exceeding the average of a religion that, like all monotheistic ones, has anthropomorphic inclinations.

since it is difficult or even impossible that anybody should manage, autonomously and from the beginning, to learn all that is necessary to him concerning a certain topic, and it being difficult that he will manage to do so concerning the knowledge of the varieties of juridical reasoning, how much truer will that be for rational knowledge!

Hence, if somebody has already engaged in investigating rational reasoning, it is obvious that it is our duty, insofar as we are walking in their footsteps,¹⁰ to refer to what our predecessors have already stated, be it somebody professing our own religion or not. Actually, if, when performing a sacrifice, we use a suitable tool, it is absolutely of no importance for the validity of the sacrifice whether this tool belongs to somebody professing our same religion or not. The essential point is that the conditions of performing the ceremony are correct.¹¹ It is clear that by “those not professing our reli-

¹⁰ The text has: *nastaʿin(a) ʿalā mā naḥnu bi-sabilihī bi-mā qalahu man taqaddamanā*. Hourani 1976, p. 46 translates: “to seek help towards our goal from what has been said by such a predecessor”. Butterworth in Averroes 2001: “to rely on what the one who has preceded us says about what we are pursuing”. Alonso 1947, p. 154: “debemos servirnos, como de ayuda para nuestros estudios filosóficos, de los investigaciones realizadas por todos los que nos han precedido en la labor”. Geoffroy in Averroes 1996: “Si d’autres que nous ont déjà procédé à quelque recherche en cette matière, il est évident que nous avons l’obligation, pour ce vers quoi nous nous acheminons, de recourir à ce qu’en ont dit ceux qui nous ont précédés”. As Martínez Lorca 1990, p. 64 notes: “According to the proper genetic method [of Averroes], human culture and particularly philosophy are a slow and progressive conquest, obtained not by a man only but by humanity as a whole; one cannot progress in the scientific field without a prior knowledge of the previous contributions”.

¹¹ Arabic: *tadkiya*, controversial term, for which see Hourani 1959, note B, p. 16, that contests Gauthier’s interpretation (ed. of *Faṣl* 1942, reprinted 1958) that reads *tazkiya*, which is “purification”. As a matter of fact, ‘Amāra and Hourani’s hypothesis is more significant in this context. Alonso 1947, p. 154: “el instrumento de que nos servimos para salir del error”. Geoffroy: “critères de conformité”. Butterworth in Averroes 2001: “no consideration is given, with respect to the validity of the sacrifice, as to whether the tool belongs to someone who shares in our religion or not”.

gion", I mean the ancients (who engaged in speculative issues) before Islam's religion.¹²

If the question is put in these terms, and if all we need for the study of rational reasoning has already been carefully investigated and in the best way by the ancient (philosophers), it is appropriate that we eagerly take their books in our hands and examine their opinions in depth. And if all this is true, we shall accept it from them; but if something seems false, we shall notice it.

Once we have accomplished this examination and have mastered methods by which we shall get rightful consideration of existing beings and determine that they have been produced—for who does not know the production, shall not know the product, and who does not know the product, does not know the producer—, then it will be necessary to address the analysis of existing beings according to that order and that arrangement we will have inferred from the knowledge obtained by means of demonstrative reasoning.

It is furthermore clear that the end we are pursuing (by the study) of existing beings is pursuable by a progress in successive stages of the inquiry, and that the successor must ensure, to this purpose, his predecessors' help, just as it happens in mathematical sciences. Let's suppose, for example, that the art of geometry does not exist nowadays, nor astronomy; if a man wanted to calculate on his own the measure of celestial bodies, and their shape and their form and their mutual distances, that would be impossible for him. So, for instance, he would not be able to know, even if he were by nature the wisest of men, the proportions of the Earth or the Sun or other things relating to the measurement of stars, if revelation or something similar did not come and assist. Thus, if somebody told him that the Sun is greater than the Earth by 150 or 160 times, he would think the supporter of such a thesis to be mad, while the demonstration carried out according to astronomic science confirms the hypothesis in such a manner that not even an astronomer could absolutely doubt it.¹³

¹² That is, essentially, the Greek philosophers.

¹³ Averroes repeats the example in the *Incoherence of the incoherence* (Averroes 1930, pp. 207–208; tr. Averroes 1997, p. 235): "The common

A binding analogy exists between the mathematical sciences and that of the principles of Law. Indeed, the expertise in Law becomes perfect only after a very long time. And if, nowadays, somebody should wish to autonomously gather all evidence that the diverse (juridical) schools have formulated upon controversial issues—issues upon which the dispute is open in the majority of Islamic countries, except the Maghreb¹⁴—, he would risk being laughed at, because the enterprise would be prohibitive, on the grounds of the exhaustive handling that has already been performed thereof. This self-evident truth concerns not only the theoretical disciplines, but also the practical ones, since, also for them, there is none that anyone might claim to establish on his own part from the beginning.

And so how will matters look for the supreme discipline, philosophy?¹⁵ If all this (that has been said up to now) is true, it is nec-

man... if he were told that the Sun is about 170 times bigger than the Earth, would think that it is an absurdity... The only way to draw on a similar knowledge is demonstration... If this happens in geometrical or mathematical questions, namely that, when a conclusion is explained to a common man, it appears fallacious to him..., how much more will that happen in case of metaphysical sciences, since this kind of knowledge is not based on plausible assumptions that satisfy the understanding of the populace”.

¹⁴ Hourani 1976, note 44, p. 89, points out that “The art “of the principles of the Law” (*ṣināʿa uṣūl al-fiqh*) had been neglected there [in al-Andalus, that is in Spain] before the Almohad movement; the Malikite school had concentrated on applied Law (*ʿilm al-furūʿ*)”.

¹⁵ As mentioned in the Introduction, Averroes uses here the term *ḥikma*, more generic than *falsafa*, that indicates properly the philosophy of Greek origin, but with a more Islamic connotation. Avicenna uses *ḥikma* to mean also the complete knowledge that God has of the causes of things, or the perfection reached by the human soul that devotes itself to speculative truths. A. Martin’s note (in Averroes 1984, p. 35, note 37) is, in this regard, commendable stressing that *ḥikma* means first of all *wisdom*. It is an Arabic Qurʾānic word (for example, Q. 16:125). In Averroes, the two terms appear coordinated, which means that he considers them as interchangeable. In the *Decisive Treatise*, the two words alternate each other, although it is *ḥikma* rather than *falsafa* which expresses the notion of *philosophy*. It is true that in the *Treatise*, whose purpose is to legitimise the study

essary for us (philosophers) that, should we find with our predecessors, no matter how ancient a people they belonged to, someone who has already looked into the analysis and the examination of existing reality applying the provided rules for demonstration, we would engage in studying the statements contained in their books. And what they have said which conforms to truth, we shall accept joyfully and shall be thankful for; while that which they have said diverging from truth, we shall highlight and mistrust, though forgiving them for the mistake they made.

Hence it is clear that the study of the books of the ancients is mandatory by Law, because their purpose and their intention are the same ones as to that which the Law incites us. Those prohibiting anyone who would have the capability thereto, that is, someone possessing natural intelligence jointly with religious integrity and virtuous or scientific and moral straightforwardness, to engage therewith, would bar the way through which the Law calls men on to the knowledge of God. And because it is the door of theoretical study, the only one leading to an authentic penetration of divine truth, this kind of prohibition represents an act of ignorance and alienation from the Most High.

Therefore, it is not at all licit to anyone erring or failing in the enterprise of philosophical study, be it for lack of ability or for logical indiscipline or for excess of passions or for not having found a teacher able to educate and inform him or for all these reasons put together—, it is not licit to him, as we were saying, to forbid anyone else who is capable to do so to engage in what he has failed to accomplish.

Indeed, such a failure (in philosophical study) is accidental with reference to its causes, and not substantial; so, that there is no reason for which what is useful by its nature and worth should be neglected because of some features present in it by accident. Therefore, when a man, whose brother's diarrhoea the Prophet had ad-

of the sciences and of philosophical speculation in the eyes of orthodoxy, Averroes makes an effort to use the term *falsafa* as little as possible. From this, the fallback on *hikma*, word derived from the Qur'ān. This clearly allows the author to find in the Holy Book a justification for philosophical research.

vised to cure with honey had complained that, on the contrary, the diarrhoea had increased after the honey had been consumed, the Prophet—may peace be unto him!—answered: “God is right! It is your brother’s womb who is lying”.¹⁶

So, we are saying that anyone prohibiting those with the faculty thereof to study the philosophers’ books with the excuse that there have been despicable men who diverted from the right path precisely because of that study, is similar to him who prevents a thirsty man from drinking fresh water, until he dies, with the excuse that he might be suffocated by it. Indeed, to die because water has been swallowed badly is accidental, while to die of thirst is according to substance and necessity.

What appears accidental in this discipline (philosophy) is just as accidental in all other disciplines. How many jurists have been led by Law to doubt (faith) and to be tangled in worldly business! As a matter of fact, most jurists are now in these regrettable (moral) conditions, although the object of their study requires, by election, the ethical practice of virtue. Therefore, it is not unlikely that in a discipline implying ethical virtue, that what happens by accident in a discipline implying theoretical virtue may also accidentally happen.

Having established all this, and being convinced, as Muslims, that our divine religion is true, and that it incites us to pursue that greatest happiness that consists of the knowledge of God the Powerful and Exalted and of his creatures, it can be derived that for every Muslim, according to his temper and his nature, a particular kind of consent¹⁷ to these truths is provided. Indeed, men’s personalities differ qualitatively as far as this consent is concerned, being there those giving it to rational demonstration, those giving it to

¹⁶ That is: in itself, in essence, honey is good for diarrhoea; if it is not beneficial to your brother, it is because, by chance, his organism does not tolerate it.

¹⁷ Arabic: *taşdiq*. It is one of the key terms of the *Decisive Treatise*. It indicates the obligation that every man has to adhere to truth, everyone proportionately to their own ability (cf. Campanini 1989, p. 22). *Taşdiq* indicates, however, also the “judgment”, that is, literally, the ability to judge according to truth (and therefore to bring “assent” to it).

dialectic disputes with the same intensity of those believing in demonstrations—and this because their nature does not allow them otherwise—, and those giving it to rhetorical discourse, also with the same intensity as those believing in demonstrations.

Thus, since our divine religion calls men to itself according to these three ways, the given consent is generalised, and only those are excluded who obstinately demand to fight it with words or those who, out of their own negligence, refuse to welcome the most suitable way leading to God. The Prophet—peace be unto him!—was sent with a particular message “to the white and to the black”, thanks to the fact that religion includes all possible ways to get closer to God. And the Most High made this very clear, saying:

“Call men to God’s path, with wise and good warnings, and discuss with them in the best way” (Q. 16:125).¹⁸

Now, since our religion is true and incites to a speculative activity culminating in God’s knowledge, we Muslims may not but be firmly convinced that demonstrative speculation cannot lead to any different conclusions from those revealed by religion, because the True cannot contrast with the True, on the contrary it conforms to it and bears witness to it.

Being it so, if demonstrative speculation leads to the knowledge of any real being, the prerequisite is inescapable that that real being is either mentioned or omitted in the Scriptures. If it is omitted, there is no contradiction (between religion and philosophy), because that case would be identical to the jurist who, not finding some legal principle in the Scriptures, must deduce it by analogy. If, on the contrary, religious texts mention them, one of the two occurs: either the apparent sense of the philosophical conclusion agrees with or it contrasts with those texts. If it agrees, there is no problem. Yet if it contrasts, the necessity of an allegorical interpretation of the Scriptures¹⁹ arises. Allegorical interpreta-

¹⁸ The “wise warnings” are those addressed to the philosophers; the “good warnings” are the rhetorical advices addressed to the populace; the “discussion” is clearly the dialectics proper to theologians.

¹⁹ Averroes goes here to the very heart of the speculative problem that he raised: the Scriptures speak to every man; but their meanings are

not perspicuous and the difficult or ambiguous expressions (those that the Qurʾān calls *mutaṣābihāt*, Q. 3:7, and that Zilio Grandi translates with “allegorical verses” while Abdel Haleem with “ambiguous”, a rendering I more agree with) can be understood only by the philosophers. The potential danger of the assumption of Averroes in the eyes of the traditionalists consists in the fact that philosophical understanding implies, indeed, overstepping the literal meaning of the holy text in a hermeneutic, metaphoric or allegorical or strictly theoretical way. An enemy of the Cordovan thinker could easily object to him that interpreting the Scriptures hermeneutically could mean misinterpreting the word of God itself, or distort it, with the risk of falling into heresy. Averroes might respond that “religious Law gives God the ability to hear and to see in order to remind us that God owns every kind of knowledge and understanding. Now, the masses are not able to understand the meaning of this attribute but in terms of [physically] “hearing” and of “seeing”, therefore the allegorical exegesis of the attribute, which cannot be considered as one of the dogmas that the Law forces onto everyone, is reserved only to the wise men” (Averroes 1930, p. 454 and tr. Averroes 1997, p. 423). Averroes overcomes the difficulty recalling the difference between required truths, to whom every man has to give consent indiscriminately, and supererogatory truths, whose knowledge can be reserved to the philosophers only (cf. “Introduction”, *supra*, p. 25–26). The loophole, obviously, works only in so far as one admits a rank of approximations to the “truth”, that therefore does not result absolute, but relative and proportional to the intellectual ability and to the argumentative techniques of the single individuals.

It is interesting to note how al-Ġazālī (cf. later note 30), whom Averroes attacks so harshly, substantially shares the concern about an indiscriminate dissemination of knowledge. Precisely when commenting the just mentioned Qurʾānic verse Q. 16:125, al-Ġazālī states that “God taught that some men are called to him through wisdom [philosophy], others through the warning [preaching], others through the dispute [dialectics]” (al-Ġazālī 1980b, p. 288. In al-Ġazālī 1970a, pp. 92 ff., many indications can be found on how the unwary men are strayed and misled because of their pertinacity to deal with problems that they do not understand adequately). Bello 1989, p. 58, writes that al-Ġazālī considers duty of the masses following the literal and apparent meaning of the Revelation, while speculative men, theologians, can investigate the meaning of the Revelation according to the prerequisite of the necessity and interpret it based on decisive evidences. al-Ġazālī’s and Averroes’ positions, naturally, differ on the demonstrative trust to give to philosophy, which, for the Persian thinker, is not always able to demonstrate what it boldly seeks to

tion means to transport the argumentation from a real to a metaphorical level—without, by this, derogating from Arabic linguistic standards in the use of metaphors—, so as to define something either with a synonym or referring to its cause or its effect or to something else that might be comparable thereto, or finally to all those peculiarities that can be found in the diverse kinds of metaphorical discourse.

If acting in this way is licit to the jurist in most of the topics related to the Law, so much more will it be rightful for he who follows the science of demonstrations! And indeed, the jurist only employs a reasoning that is based upon subjective opinion only, while the learned uses a reasoning based on certainty.²⁰

Then we shall state with strength that, if a conclusion we reach through demonstration contrasts with the apparent meaning of Scriptures, it is this very apparent meaning to need interpreta-

(or at least this is the thesis of the *Tabāfut al-falāsifa* or *Incoherence of the philosophers*, although the most modern Ghazalian historiography is inclined to emphasise the philosophical character of the speculation of the Persian thinker; cf. *infra* again notes n. 30 and 53).

²⁰ Arabic: *qiyās yaqīnī*: “Certainty” or *yaqīn* is, related to “truth” or *ḥaqq*, another key term of the *Decisive Treatise*. In the logical work *al-Ḍarūrī fī’l-Manṭiq* (*The Necessary in Logic*), Averroes says: “Absolute certainty (*yaqīn ‘alā al-iṭlāq*) consists of thinking the true object (*ṣayy’ ṣādiq*), that is to say what exists in the mind (*dīhn*) in the same way as it exists outside itself”. It is a definition of certainty coherent with the epistemological realism that we have already highlighted several times in Averroes: thought reflects reality objectively. However, continuing his analysis in the same passage, Averroes adds interesting nuances to the concept of certainty: it also consists “of firmly believing that the existence of the object cannot conflict with what we think of it (*bi-ḥilāf mā i’taqadnā fih*); ... finally, in behaving, even when we suppose something to be against our belief, so as to deem impossible that which contradicts what we believe in” (cit. in Abdou 1973, pp. 203–204). The certainty becomes, therefore, almost a psychological constraint, to which we cannot back out of. This depends, clearly, on the objective correspondence between the knowledge and the known object, but also from a value of truth completely internal to reasoning and demonstrative inquiry.

tion,²¹ according to—be it understood—the rules of Arab linguistic exegesis.²² This fact is not questioned by any Muslim, nor is it disputed by any believer. In this way, indeed, the certainty of those is increased who engage in and exert exegesis, aiming at connecting the intellect with revealed tradition.

What's more: we claim that of all the expression in the Scriptures whose literal sense contrasts with demonstrative conclusions, if the Holy Text is examined and investigated with patience and care in all its parts, other parallel statements will be found that shall bear witness, precisely with their literal meaning, to the (correctness) of the interpretation, or at least shall get very close thereto.

²¹ The crucial term *ta'wil* appears here, that etymologically indicates the “going back to the origin” but that it is normally used in the technical language of the Islamic thought to indicate “hermeneutics”. Such hermeneutics can be, obviously, of different kinds: grammatical-linguistic, symbolic-allegorical, gnostic-esoteric and naturally rationalistic-philosophical. Averroes uses the term very often and flexibly in the *Treatise*, sometimes alluding precisely to a hermeneutics of the allegorical-symbolic kind that transfigures the literal meaning of the Qur'ānic text to lead to a more intimate meaning, not immediately evident in the letter; sometimes suggesting that the demonstrative inquiry of philosophy is the only one able to understand the meanings placed in a revelation that God wanted to address “to the white and to the black”. This flexibility implies considerable difficulties for the translation. I looked for a simplification by limiting myself to translating almost always *ta'wil* with the pure and simple “interpretation”. It goes without saying that the gnostic-esoteric dimension of the interpretation, typical of Shiism and of the *ṣūfī* mystic, is completely alien to the Averroistic mentality, and therefore it must not even be considered. On the other hand, the *ta'wil* represents, coherently with the contemporary philosophy language, the true and proper “hermeneutics”, far from the *tafsīr*, or rather from the traditional commentary based on linguistic, literary style, historic, prosopographic issues, etc, but usually without questioning the literal meaning.

²² Any kind of interpretation, Averroes says, cannot be but congruent with the grammar rules of the language in which it is expressed, in this case Arabic. It follows that the language places very specific restrictions to the freedom of interpretation, which has to happen, anyway, within a co-dex understandable by everyone. Another Zāhirite presupposition.

For this reason, Muslims know that it is not obligatory to understand all expressions in the Scriptures according to their apparent meaning, nor to force them by means of interpretation. They rather have different opinions concerning which revealed passage it is proper to subject to interpretation and which is not. For instance, the Aš'arite²³ allegorise the verse that states that "God directed himself" (Q. 2:29)²⁴ or the *ḥadīṭ* of his descent towards the sublunar heaven,²⁵ whereas the Hanbalites²⁶ accept them literally.

The cause of the fact that within religion there is an exoteric and an esoteric meaning²⁷ depends on the diversity of opinions of

²³ Aš'arism has been, perhaps, the most important theological school of Sunni Islam. The progenitor and eponym was Abū'l-Ḥasan al-Aš'arī, who was born in Baṣra in 874 and died around 935. Disciple of a Mu'tazilite, al-Aš'arī has been a defector of his mentor and he drew up a theology in complete opposition to the Mu'tazilite one. The fundamental principles of this theology are: a) the reality of the divine attributes that are separated from the essence of God; b) the denial of the agent capability of man, because the only "agent" is God; c) the admission that the Qur'ān is God's eternal, uncreated and immutable "word"; d) neither does sin mean for man absolute condemnation, nor the good action absolute salvation: damnation or salvation are a sovereign discretion of God, that behaves according to the highest degree of justice, anyway; e) the caliphal bloodline of the Prophet Muḥammad has been corrected according to the order of succession of the first four "well guided" caliphs, who are Abū Bakr, 'Umar, 'Utmān and 'Alī. For an overall view see Laoust 1983b *passim*; Gardet-Anawati 1981 *passim*; and Caspar 1987, pp. 174–201, and particularly Gimaret 1990.

²⁴ The Arabic term is *istimā'*.

²⁵ For the meaning of *ḥadīṭ*, cf. the previous note 8. The tradition is gathered in al-Buḥārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, XCVIII, 35 (about al-Buḥārī see the following note 34).

²⁶ Those are Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal's followers, a famous jurist and traditionalist, who died in 855. The Hanbalites are particularly rigorist and they sustain the necessity of a strictly literal approach to the holy text. The most famous Ḥanbalite theologian was Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328), about him cf. Caspar 1987, pp. 219–222; Laoust 1983b, pp. 266–273 and, *passim*, also Laoust 1983a. The bibliography has now become very lengthy, and it is not necessary to give further technical references here.

²⁷ The Arabic terms are *ẓāhir*, which is exoteric or apparent, and *baṭīn*

men and on their natural inclination to consent. And the cause of the fact that within the Scriptures there exist passages mutually contradictory as far as their literal sense is concerned, is that in this way the exegetic abilities of scholars well-grounded in science are roused, who may engage in connecting them.

To this purpose does the Most High's warning point to when He says: "He is who has revealed the Book to you: and it contains both solid verses, which are the Book's Mother, and ambiguous verses. Yet those who have a corrupt heart will follow what is ambiguous, eager to bring about schism and to interpret imaginatively, while the true interpretation of those passages is known to no-one but God [and] men of solid science will say: We believe in this Book, it all comes from our Lord".²⁸

or esoteric and hidden. They are words with deep gnostic-metaphysical values, beginning with the fact that the Qur'ān uses them also as attributes of God: "He is the First, He is the Last, He is the Manifest (*ẓāhir*), He is the Hidden (*bāṭin*), He is of all things knowing" (Q. 57:3). The distinction between exoteric and esoteric is particularly significant for the Shiites, who make of it the cornerstone of the obligation to interpret the Qur'ān hermeneutically, but also gnostically. Urvoy 1991, p. 77 writes that for Averroes "the Truth does not contradict the Truth, and therefore it is legitimate to join "what is given by reason and what is given by tradition". For this purpose, Ibn Rushd adopts the distinction, already traced by the mystics, between the apparent meaning (*ẓāhir*) and the hidden (*bāṭin*), with allegorical interpretation as corollary. This interpretative key remains within the horizon of the Almohad rationalism, and it has the simple purpose to avoid the impieties and the heresies that rise from anthropomorphism".

²⁸ Q. 3:7. Cf. Hayoun-De Libera 1991, pp. 22–23. I reported the verse in full, which is only mentioned in the text and, as is evident, I offered my own translation adapting it to the context and to the Averroist intention. The verse is one of the most controversial in the Qur'ān, because it gives rise to two possible readings depending on where you put the full stop. The classical Qur'ānic Arabic does not know punctuation marks; therefore, it is possible to read both "... it is not known but by God and by the men of solid science. They will say...", and to read "... it is not known but by God. The men of solid science will say..." (cf. later p. 91 and 102). As we will see, Averroes obviously prefers the first reading because it seems to suggest that philosophers are able to demonstratively

Let us consider now the following objection: In religious Law, there are propositions that Muslims agree must be maintained according to their literal sense, others which need interpretation, others on which opinions diverge. Now, is it perhaps licit that demonstration leads us to interpret that on which we agree the literal sense to be maintained, or to maintain the literal sense of that which we agree has to be subject to interpretation? To this objection, we shall answer: it is not right if the community's consent²⁹ was obtained by certain methods; if it was obtained thanks to subjective opinion, then it is right. As a matter of fact, Abū Ḥāmid (al-Ġazālī)³⁰ and Abū'l-Ma'ālī (al-Ġuwaynī)³¹ and other authoritative

understand the allegories and the problems of the revelation in the same way as God does, while the second reading seems more "fideistic", reserving this cognitive ability only to God. This does not alter the fact that the second reading is appropriate to put a brake to interpretation.

²⁹ Arabic: *iğmā'*. It is a very significant term in Islamic theology (anyone interested in looking into subtleties, refer to Gardet-Anawati 1981, pp. 403–407) and in Islamic political thought (Campanini 2006). It indicates, essentially, the consensus of the doctors of the Law and it is one of the four "foundations" of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*; the other three are: the Qur'ān, the *sunna* of the Prophet and analogic reasoning). Averroes' opinion on the *iğmā'* is summarised by Bello 1989, p. 144, who argues that for Averroes the method thanks to which one can reach the *iğmā'* on the theoretic questions is never sure: consequently, the *iğmā'* itself cannot be sure. It is then possible that the demonstration leads to allegorically interpret what the doctors of the Law have agreed to be able to assume in the apparent sense. Similarly, the demonstration can lead to assume in the literal way what scholars have agreed to interpret allegorically. This happens because, on the theoretical questions, a true *iğmā'* is unattainable. Therefore, in Averroes' point of view, there is no problem that arises concerning a potential breach of the *iğmā'*, because actually it does not exist.

³⁰ *The imām*, the "proof of Islam" (*ḥuḡḡatu'l-Islām*) Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad Ibn Muḥammad al-Ġazālī, already quoted many times, has probably been the main Islamic thinker of all time. Born in Ṭūs, in Persia, around 1056, friend of the great Seljuk vizier Nizām al-Mulk, he was a professor of Shāfi'ite jurisprudence first in the Madrasa Nizāmiya of Baghdad from 1091 to 1095, and then in the Madrasa Nizāmiya of Nīšāpūr from 1106 to 1109. He travelled to Syria and Palestine and he did the pilgrimage to Mecca between 1096 and 1098. He died in Ṭūs in 1111.

thinkers claimed that nobody can be accused of unbelief who breaks the community's consent concerning the (need to) an interpretation in issues similar to those we have just evoked.³²

Indeed, it is possible to demonstrate that the community's consent is not able to offer certain answers concerning speculative problems, whereas it possesses the faculty to do so concerning ethical-practical problems. Therefore it is not possible for it to offer solutions to any question at any time, unless that time has been exactly specified by us; if the global footprint of the learned men who

His best-known works are *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* (*Tabāfut al-Falāsifa*), rebutted by Averroes in the equally famous *Incoherence of incoherence* (*Tabāfut al-Tabāfut*), and the *Revival of the Religious Sciences* (*Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*), an extraordinary religious, mystical, juridic, but also philosophical encyclopedia that is one of the monuments of the Islamic culture. al-Ġazālī studied the philosophers passionately and was fascinated by their doctrine. The traces of philosophy in his thought are irrefutable, but it is disputed whether he should be considered a philosopher *tout court*. Certainly, in the *Tabāfut al-Falāsifa* he shows himself eager to refute philosophy for fear of the consequences that it might have had on religious orthodoxy. For this reason, Averroes, even in the *Decisive Treatise*, always contests him with reprobation and sometimes even with acrimony, even though, as it was seen, (cf. the note 19), their positions were not always completely contrasting. About the Averroes- al-Ġazālī dialectics the analysis of Leaman 2002 is still interesting, even though sometimes debatable; cf. Puig Montada 2005 and also Campanini 2004 pp. 121–134.

³¹ Abū'l-Ma'ālī al-Guwaynī, called the *imām al-Ḥarāmī* (that is the *imām* of the two mosques, Mecca and Medina), was a famous Aš'arite theologian and master of al-Ġazālī. He lived in Mecca and in Medina and then for long years in Nīšāpūr, in Persia. He died in 1085. Among his works the *Kitāb al-Šāmil fī Uṣūl al-Dīn* or *Complete Book on the principles of the Religion*, and the *Kitāb al-Iršād* or *Book of the Righteous Guide*.

³² Averroes refers to the authority of the two prestigious orthodox theologians in order to support his own point of view, which is not entirely orthodox: namely, that some particularly gifted men, philosophers, have the right-duty of interpreting certain passages of the Scriptures, even at the expense of countering the *iğmā'*. As to al-Ġazālī, he wrote the *Fayṣal al-tafriqa bayna al-Islām wa'l-ẓundaqa* (*Criterion of distinction between Islam and religious deviance*) in order to demonstrate the difficulty or even impossibility of charging a Muslim of unbelief: his care was to avoid internal religious strife.

live at that time is not well-known to us, both in their individuality and in their globality; if, concerning the discussed question, the opinion of each of them has not reached us thanks to a rigorous transmission chain;³³ and if the learned living at that (determined) time, according to us, agree on the fact that there does not exist, in religious Law, an exoteric or apparent sense and an esoteric or hidden one. (In that case), the knowledge of any problem must not be concealed to anyone, because men should share only one interpretation of religion.

It has been handed down that many of the first (Muslims) were persuaded that religious Law would possess an apparent and a hidden meaning, and that the esoteric meaning must not be known by those who do not belong to the number of men of science or are not able to understand it. Al-Buḥārī³⁴ reports that ‘Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib³⁵—God be satisfied with him!—said: “Speak to people about what they know! Or would you refute God and his Messenger?”. Other traditions of the same content are known to come from the

³³ The science of the Islamic traditions is based on the principle of the mainly oral transmission (*naql*) of various statements and claims from more ancient authoritative sources. The chain of the transmitters, that can be more or less “weak” depending on the authority of the components, is called *isnād*.

³⁴ Al-Buḥārī, who died in 870, was, together with Muslim, the most valuable collector and systematiser of the *aḥādīṭ* that refer the opinions and the behaviour of the Prophet Muḥammad. The book written by him is called, meaningfully, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, which means “genuine”, “veracious”. A selection of extracts of the *Ṣaḥīḥ* was published in Italian in Turin, Utet, 1982, with the title *Detti e Fatti del Profeta dell’Islam (Words and deeds of the Prophet of the Islam)*, by V. Vacca, S. Noja and M. Vallaro and later (2014) in Milano by A. Ventura, while in English there is at least the translation by Aftab Ahmad, Lahore 1962, but now the text is easily available also by digital resources.

³⁵ Cousin and son-in-law of Muḥammad, he was the fourth caliph and reigned from 656 to 661. He was murdered in Kufa, in Iraq, and after his death the supreme power passed to the Umayyads’s dynasty. ‘Alī and his sons al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn (the latter killed in Kerbalā’ in 680 by the Umayyad Yazīd I) are the first *imams* of the Shiites, that is of the theological and political confession that refused the legitimacy of the Umayyad caliphate. Shiites means, indeed, “partisans” (of ‘Alī).

globality of the very first Muslims. How is it possible then to imagine a generalised consent being handed down to us concerning any of the major speculative problems? We very well know that in all epochs men of science were not lacking who claimed that religion is the kind of knowledge whose deepest and most authentic meaning must not be known to the totality of men.

The case of ethical-practical issues is quite different. Here everybody agrees on the (need) for a wide diffusion (of that kind of knowledge) with all men indistinctly; and in order to reach a generalised consent on them, it is in our opinion sufficient that a problem be rooted out under all aspects and that no particular difference of opinions has been passed on to us. Yet if this is enough to obtain the consent upon ethical-practical questions, it is not so at all—let us repeat it—for speculative questions.

One might object: If we must not accuse of unbelief those breaking up the community's consent through interpretation, because, in such cases, there can exist no generalised consent, what then with Islamic philosophers like Abū Naṣr (al-Fārābī)³⁶ and Ibn Sīnā?³⁷ Indeed, Abū Ḥāmid (al-Ġazālī) charges them with unbelief in his well-known book *The incoherence of the philosophers* referring to

³⁶ Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī, one of the main Islamic philosophers, tried a reconciliation between Plato and Aristotle. He composed a *Catalogue of the Sciences*, an *Agreement between the opinions of the philosophers Aristotle and Plato*, the “divine”, a famous political work, the *Virtuous City* or *al-Madīna al-Fāḍila*, and many other political, logical and metaphysical writings. A first introductory global reconstruction in Badawi 1972, 11, pp. 478–575, even if obviously the bibliography about him is today very huge and it does not matter to be quoted here. He died in 950. His political works are translated in Italian in al-Fārābī 2007 and in English in 2001 and 2015.

³⁷ He is the famous Avicenna, well-known in the Christian medieval world both as a doctor (his *Canon* was studied until the late Renaissance) and as a philosopher (his *Kitāb al-Ṣifāʾ* or *Book of Healing* is the most famous). He had a troubled life, having been a politician as well as a thinker, and he lived in the Persia that was torn by conflicts between emirs and sultans, dying in 1037 in Isfahān. The bibliography on Avicenna too is huge and it is not the place to indicate it here. I quote again the global reconstruction by Badawi 1972, 11, pp. 595–695, by Cruz Hernandez 1963, 1, pp. 69–112 and by Amos Bertolacci in D’Ancona 2005.

three questions:³⁸ the world's eternity; the fact that God does not know the particulars—but the Most High is far above all that!—; and the interpretation of the resurrection of the bodies³⁹ and of the (modes) of future life. Now, we say: It seems however that (al-Ġazālī's) charge of unbelief must not be understood in an absolute way, since in the book *On Distinction* he himself explains how the charge of unbelief for the breach of the community's consent is only conceivable.⁴⁰

From what we have said, it is clear that it is not possible to obtain a generalised consent on (theological) questions like those just mentioned, since, as was handed down by many of the first Muslims and by others yet, interpretations must not be formulated but for those who are experienced with them, hence well-trained in science. Indeed we want to set a full stop after the Most High's words, "men of solid science..."⁴¹ If the learned didn't apply allegorical interpretation, they would not possess that superior ability to consent which makes it obligatory for them to believe, which is not the case with the uncultivated.

God Himself, then, defines (the learned) as men of faith, meaning by faith precisely that which is reached by means of demonstration and that cannot but follow interpretation. On the contrary, the men not of science who may be thought to be believers are those who do not ground their faith upon demonstration. If there is a kind of faith that God acknowledges to the learned, it is

³⁸ Also in the *Deliverer from Error* (al-Ġazālī 1970a, pp. 96–97), al-Ġazālī claims that the three arguments for which philosophers have to be considered "infidels" are; "a) the bodies will not gather together after resurrection...; b) the Exalted God knows the universals and not the particulars...; c) the universe is pre-existent *ab aeterno*".

³⁹ In this case, the interpretation is certainly allegorical!

⁴⁰ al-Ġazālī 1980a, p. 165 (chap. IX). In this passage, in fact, Averroes admits that "the issue about the consent is most obscure", because it is subject to several variables, and only if a total unanimity between the authorities exists is it possible to start discussing whether and how a thinker can be accused of unbelief.

⁴¹ It is the reading of the controversial passage Q. 3:7 that was mentioned in the previous note 28, thanks to which Averroes recognises the philosophers an interpretative ability equivalent to God's.

necessary that this be grounded on demonstration; and if it is grounded on demonstration, it can but accompany itself to allegorical interpretation. As a matter of fact, God Most High communicated to us that (ambiguous verses) may be interpreted in such a way as to understand their true meaning; and what is demonstration if not something (relating to) truth? Since this is how things are, it is not likely that, concerning the allegorical interpretations that God has peculiarly reserved to the learned, a truly generalised consent will be achieved. Such a conclusion is immediately evident for every person with a balanced mind.

We see that Abū Ḥāmid (al-Ġazālī) was mistaken as far as Aristotelian philosophers were concerned, when he attributed them the statement that the Holiest and Exalted God does not know particulars at all. Actually, philosophers only claim that God Most High knows through a science which is of a totally different sort from ours. Indeed, human science is an effect of the known object and is produced when (the known object) comes into being, while it changes when (the known object) is modified. On the contrary, God's science of existing beings is the very cause of these existing known objects. So that, those trying to make these two kinds of knowledge alike are actually trying to transform two completely different and autonomously well-characterised things into one; and this is a sign of deep ignorance. Indeed, if the term "science" were meant both as derivative knowledge and eternal knowledge, it would imply an absolute semantic homonymy, as it often happens (in the Arabic language) with names possessing a double and opposite meaning: for instance *ḡalāl*, indicating both large and small, or *ṣarīm*, indicating both light and darkness. Thus, divine and human science cannot be traced back to a single dimension, as the *mutakallimūn* (theologians), our contemporaries, would strongly claim to do. As far as we are concerned, we dedicated a short treatise there-to, as some friends advised us to do.⁴²

How can one think that Aristotelian philosophers claim that God—be He praised!—does not know the particulars by eternal science, whereas they think that truthful dreams contain anticipa-

⁴² It is the *Ḍamima* or "Appendix", here translated after the *Decisive Treatise*.

tions of minimum facts that will happen in the future, and this forecasting knowledge comes to man during sleep thanks to the pre-existence of an eternal science that orders all things and embraces them? Philosophers, rather, think that God does not know particulars only, but even universals in a different way from that we (men) know them. Indeed, universals are also known to us as an effect of the nature of reality, while, as far as divine science goes, things go in a completely opposite sense. Demonstration leads us to conclude that divine science transcends attributions such as “universal” or “particular”, and there is no reason to dispute this topic, that is, to accuse philosophers of unbelief or not to do so.

As far as the question goes, whether the world is eternal or it has been created,⁴³ the contradiction existing between Aš‘arite the-

⁴³ Although we already dwelled long on this problem in the “Introduction”, it is worth coming back on it, given the extreme interest of the matter. In the *Incoherence of the Incoherence*, Averroes writes: “If the world were eternal and existing in itself... then it would not have an agent (that produced it) at all. However, if “eternal” means what is eternally produced in a way that this production has neither a beginning nor an end, certainly the attribute of the “production” is more correctly applied to that who eternally produces than to that who gives place to a limited production. In this (just stated) respect, the world is produced by God, and the term “production” is more appropriate than the one of “eternity”. The philosophers call the world eternal just to hedge against a misunderstanding of the word “production” if it is understood as “something produced out of a state of non-existence, from a pre-existent substrate and in time” (Averroes 1930, p. 162; tr. Averroes 1997, p. 200). Averroes seems here to support without ambiguity that the world, even being God’s production, is coeternal with Him (on the creation *ex-nihilo* as not explicitly declared in the Qur’ān, cfr. already Arnaldez 1957a). However, the position of the Cordovan philosopher is more nuanced. Wolfson’s comment (1961, p. 377) seems to me to be punctual: “Averroes rejects the idea that the world is coeternal with God in the sense that it is eternally issued by God [but on the fluctuations of the Averroist thought on this topic, see Kogan 1981]. According to him, the world is coeternal with God in the sense that God is eternally its driving force. But this quality of the world, that is to be eternally moved by God, is described by Averroes in religious terms as “eternal creation” (*muḥdaṭ*). And while he does not share the orthodox concept of the creation *ex-nihilo*, Averroes uses, however, this expression

to make explicit his own point of view, stating that it constitutes its exact interpretation". The discussion is subtle, but it highlights the kind of difficulties and of potential deformations that Averroes was facing in his attempt of establishing *a single* truth.

For his part, Kogan 1985, p. 203, highlights how the Averroist defense of the casual efficiency is based on the general conception of the change as a continuous and structured process, inherent to the specific natures of the particular objects having potentiality. It is a concept that, at once, properly agrees with his efforts to prove the eternity of the universe as a context within which change takes place continuously. The oxymoron "eternal creation" finds in Averroes a justification both physical and metaphysical: the (Aristotelian) doctrine of the eternity of movement; the one that considers absurd that the possible could never be translated into the actual, by which if a possibility exists, it will have to sooner or later be actualised; the one that considers God as a mind and a will that chooses the best, by which if God created a only finite cosmos, it would be imperfect (pp. 210–211). It is clear, however, that "the creation must be intended more in a distributive sense than in a collective one. This means that there does not exist any precise moment in the past where the world as a whole was created with the exclusion of other moments, preceding or following the one in which it was actually created. The individual parts by which the world is composed are what exists and continues to be created—potential objects, new relationships and relations between the objects. In short, the creation is not a unique event according to Averroes and certainly not an event to which it is possible to give a determined beginning. It is rather a continuous process that covers the totality of the time, identical to the generation of the single individual beings. This process can be called "creation" because it produces new entities, never existed before and also because it is, ultimately, the effect of a rational Mind and not of a blind natural force (p. 214).

Kogan's analysis confirms at last the equilibrium game of Averroes in the *Decisive Treatise*, when he distinguishes between uncreated being, created beings and a kind of being "in between", neither created nor uncreated. The creation, allegedly *ex nihilo*, gets to transform itself in the unexhausted translation from potentiality into actuality, from a non-being—which is not absolute non-existence, but a *tendency* to exist in a way of existence that consists of the effectual reality. There is no contradiction between the two terms of the issue—the "creation" and the "eternal continuous production"—, because the philosophic *discussion* prevails and, in a certain way, builds up reality.

Kogan 1984, pp. 207–212, further publishes again a little treatise of

ologians and the ancient philosophers is, in my opinion, to be traced back to a semantic question, especially as far as some of the ancients are concerned. Theologians and philosophers actually agree in saying that there are three kinds of beings: two extreme ones and one in the middle of the former; and they also agree in the definition to be given to the extremes, differing about the middle one.

One of the extremes is the being that has been translated into existence by something different from itself and by something pre-existing, that is by an acting cause and by a raw material, so that its existence is preceded by time. This modality regards those bodies whose generation is perceived through the senses, namely water, earth, air, animals, plants and similar. This kind of existing beings is defined as a “product”⁴⁴ in the same manner by Aš‘arite theologians and by ancient philosophers.

The opposite extreme is made up of a being that is produced by nothing nor is it preceded by anything else nor by time; and this kind of being was also named by the two classes of scholars in the same way, namely “eternal”. This being, which is reached in a demonstrative way, is God the Blessed and Exalted, the Maker of all things and their Preserver, be praise onto Him and be His power exalted!

As far as the middle kind is concerned, this being has not been preceded by anything nor has it got time as its antecedent, but it owes its existence to something else—to an agent outside it. Such is the world in its general outlook. Now, theologians and philosophers agree in identifying the abovementioned features in the world. Even theologians grant that no time dimension has preceded the (creation) of the world, since it would rather have been the consequence thereto, as for them, time is inextricably connected to the bodies and to the movement. Furthermore, they admit, togeth-

Averroes that has the purpose to clarify how the divergence between the ideas of orthodox theologians (*mutakallimūn*) and philosophers, is due “to the ambiguity of what they call “eternal” and “generated”. Averroes would then come up again to highlight the mainly semantic or theoretical value of the divergences.

⁴⁴ Arabic: *muḥdatha*, which also implies a sense of contingency.

er with philosophers, that time is infinite *a parte post*, just like existence in the future is infinite.⁴⁵ The only difference concerns the elapsed time and existence in the past, which theologians deem finite—and that is moreover also Plato's and his followers' doctrine—, whereas Aristotle and his school deem them as infinite as the future.

Hence, the world seems to enjoy a double resemblance: with the single existing beings and with the Eternal one. Therefore, those insisting on the resemblance of the world to God rather than with contingents, define it as “eternal”; while those who prefer insisting on the resemblance with contingents, define it as “product”. Yet the world is in fact neither properly created nor eternal, since what is created is by necessity corruptible, while the eternal has no cause determining it. There are, then—and here Plato and the Platonics are meant—those who call it “product and simultaneously coeval with time”, and this because they believe time to be finite in the past.

The theories about the world are not then so divergent one from the other that some may be considered unbeliefs and others may not. For this to happen, the statements in discussion ought to be completely divergent and opposite, as the *mutakallimūn* (theologians) indeed (mistakenly) think; that is, the qualifications of eternal or generated, if applied to the world (in its globality) would need to be actual alternatives,⁴⁶ while from what we have said up to here, it is obvious that things go in a different way.

Moreover, such theories are contrary to the literary dictate of religious Law anyway, and this appears clear if we consider those

⁴⁵ Because eternal and immortal are human souls and eternal is Heaven. One must remember that many Islamic theologians, beginning with some Muʿtazilites, considered the infernal punishment as non-eternal: on doomsday, God would destroy Ġehenna.

⁴⁶ Leaman 2002 widely discusses the problem of how it is possible that the generation of the world is not compatible with eternity. To this purpose, explaining God's creative work (as it would result from a Platonic perspective) on a pre-existing material substrate is enough. Also, the concept of emanation would not appear so unacceptable, because it would be true that the world is coeval with God, but its position and his ontological reality would result subordinate to him, anyway.

verses revealed to prophets dealing with the translation into being of the world. In those verses, we read that the world has been created, but we also read that existence and time are continuous in both extremes, that is, they know no interruptions. The Most High says indeed: "It is Him who created the heavens and the earth in six days, while His Throne hovered over waters" (Q. 11:7). If meant in the literal sense, these words indicate that a (certain form of) being was existing before *this* being, namely the Throne and the waters, and that there existed a time before *this* time, a time connected with the type of existence, namely the number of movements of the celestial sphere. In the same way, the saying by the Most High: "The day on which earth shall be changed into another earth, and the heavens in other heavens" (Q. 14:48), if meant literally, indicates that there will exist another being after *this* being. Just like the following verse: "Then He engaged in the construction of the heaven, which was all smoke" (Q. 41:11), if meant literally, indicates that the heavens have been created from something that pre-existed.

Thus, not even theologians, when they deal with the world, keep adhering to the letter of religious Law, but they rather interpret (overcoming the letter). Indeed, Scriptures do not include any text suggesting that God existed in absolute privation (of any other being). How is it conceivable, then, that the allegories of theologians receive universal consent, when the literal meaning of Scriptures on the existence of the world is more respected by schools of philosophers?

Thus, it is likely to conclude that those holding differing opinions on such abstruse questions shall be rewarded by God if they have been right; they shall be forgiven by Him if they have been wrong. And indeed, consenting to a conclusion one has reached through demonstration which is rooted in the soul is a question of obligation and not of free choice. That is, it is not our faculty to refuse or accept that consent, just like it is our faculty deciding to stand or to sit down. And since free choice is one of the conditions for legal responsibility,⁴⁷ it derives hence that only those belonging

⁴⁷ Arabic: *kāna min šarṭ al-taklīf al-iḥtiyār*. The expression has a technical-juridical meaning; that is: free choice is proper to the mature and re-

to the category of men of science are excused for having consented to a mistake, whose likeliness led them off the track. This is why the Prophet—be peace onto him!—said: “If a magistrate, exerting his judgment capacity, applies truth, he shall be doubly rewarded; if he makes a mistake, a single reward”. Now, which learned man is better than the one who knows how to judge on the reality of things, on their being so or so? These are the scholars to whom God gave the faculty of interpreting (Scriptures); and if there is a mistake that the Law forgives, it is precisely the mistake made by those who engage in the analysis of the difficult problems that the Law imposes to face.

On the other hand, the mistakes in science which have not been committed by this kind of people represent a great guilt, both if they were made in theoretical questions or if they were made in practical questions. Just like a jurist may not be forgiven for an evaluation mistake depending on his ignorance of the Prophet’s *Sunna*, one demanding to pronounce doctrines on the real world without possessing the attitude for a similar office will not be forgiven, and he is a sinner or a unbeliever. And provided that it is necessary, for a magistrate who has to decide upon licit and illicit, to possess the instruments of reasonable judging—namely the knowledge of Law principles and the method to deduce the consequences of these principles through an analogical process—, so much more irreplaceable shall the competence of that be who must study the reality of things! He must indeed possess the rational principles and the method to deduce their consequences.

Two kinds of mistakes are made in religious questions: forgivable ones, by those who are suitable for the study of the topic in which the mistake occurs—as the mistake of a skilled physician is forgivable when he is exerting medicine, or that of a zealous jurist exerting justice—, or rather unforgivable ones, of those who are not “insiders”; or again those who may not be forgiven to any of men because, concerning the fundamentals of religion, they are to be considered unbeliefs, while, if they concern the principles deriv-

sponsible man. *Taklif* means the social duty of an individual that is able to understand and act (see the following note 82).

ing from those fundamentals, they are to be considered as blamable innovations.⁴⁸

The latter sort of mistakes are those which are committed when facing questions whose knowledge can be attained following different kinds of routes, so that they turn out to be allowed to all men. They are, for instance, the acknowledgement of the Blessed and Exalted God's (existence), or prophecy or Hereafter happiness and condemnation. As a matter of fact, the three abovementioned methods—demonstrative, dialectic and rhetoric—all lead in the same way to acceptance of these three truths, truths to which no man can but consent, being indeed obliged to know them. And this happens because, those who should deny them, being the fundamentals of religion, would inevitably be unbelievers showing their unbelief by their tongue, if not by their heart, namely by an attitude of guiltily denying the clear revelations thereabout (in the revealed Books).

If a man is a part of the demonstrative class, he has a route available which, precisely through demonstration, leads him to the consent to religious truths. Correspondingly, if he is a part of the dialectic class, he will be provided with a dialectic route; if he is a part of the class of those who are satisfied with preaching, he shall be supplied with a route based on preaching. This is why the Prophet said—peace onto him!—: “I was ordered to fight men until they witness that there is no other god but God and believe in my mission”, actually meaning one of the three ways to faith, suitable to each, explained above.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Hourani 1976, p. 58, and Alonso 1947, p. 180, translate with “heresy” the arabic *bid‘a* (cf. note 7 *supra*), and Butterworth: “heretical innovation”, but I believe that Averroes intended here to moderate the intensity of the guilt.

⁴⁹ Averroes seems here moderating the sense of the Prophet’s expression, at first sight aggressive, alluding rather at Q. 16:125. The issue of the *ġihād* as a means of forced conversion is too complex to be fully addressed here. A recent and in-depth analysis in Afsaruddin 2013. In his juridical treatise, Averroes seems to theorise a military and expansive conception of the *ġihād*, and this is coherent with the expansive politics of the Almohads engaged in a harsh war with the Christian kings of the *Reconquista*. See Peters 1996, pp. 27–42. However, it is known that the term can

As far as problems are concerned whose obscurity can only be clarified through demonstration, God behaved with great mercy towards those servants of his who, be it out of their natural attitude or by habit or by educational lacks, were not able to achieve it: as a matter of fact, he formulated for them parallel examples and images to which he incited them to consent, since this kind of consent is attainable by means of dialectic or rhetorical directions sharable by all men.

This is why religious Law contains an exoteric and an esoteric side: the exoteric side consists of those images exemplifying the most intimate meaning; while the esoteric side consists of the same most intimate meaning, which results comprehensible to the demonstrative class only. These are the four or five classes of existing beings mentioned by Abū Ḥāmid (al-Ġazālī) in his book *On Distinction*.⁵⁰

Provided, as we said, that things in themselves are known by three ways, it is not necessary for us (philosophers) to make up (simplifying) images thereof when their exoteric meaning needs no allegorical interpretation.

As far as fundamental principles are concerned, actually, those subjecting the literal sense to interpretation are unbelievers: for instance, those believing that in the Hereafter no bliss or deep unhappiness are felt, and that the purpose of this statement (about

also be interpreted as a fight for the achievement of self-consciousness, of knowledge, of the control over one's own passions. Al-Ġazālī 1970b, pp. 220–221, following a famous *ḥadīth* of the Prophet, writes that the “great *ḡibād*” is the fight and the combat to master passional instincts and to make the intellect triumph.

⁵⁰ al-Ġazālī 1980a, pp. 151–152 (cap. III): “Existence has five stages...: essential (*ḍatī*), sensitive (*ḥissī*), imaginative (*ḥayālī*), mental (*ʿaqlī*) and analogical (*ṣibḥī*)... The essential existence is real and stable beyond the sensation and the intellection... The sensitive existence consists of what is depicted from the visual power of the eye and does not exist outside it... The imaginative is the representation of the sensitive objects when they are not present... The mental means that the thing has a spirit, a reality, and a meaning, and the intellect acquires its abstract meaning... The analogical is when a thing does not exist in its form, ... but what exists is something else that resembles it”. See note 32.

the Hereafter) is only to protect men from each other concerning their bodily and sensitive lives, so that future life would appear as a trick, while there would be no other purpose in human life but the mere materialistic dimension.

Having established this, it is evident that there are texts in the Scriptures whose interpretation is not licit, because interpreting the fundamental principles of faith would be unbelief; or, in the case of derivative principles, a blamable innovation. On the other hand, there are texts whose literal sense the demonstrative class is obliged to suggest an interpretation of, as, should it stop at their apparent sense, it would commit in its turn an act of unbelief. It goes without saying that the interpretation of this latter kind of texts proposed by men who do not belong to the demonstrative class would turn out to be either unbelief or blamable innovation.

Passages or traditions requiring interpretations are exemplified by those already mentioned of God's "ascent" or "descent". It is remarkable that the Prophet—be peace on him!—, when a Negro woman told him that God lived in the sky, ordered not to punish her, considering her on the contrary a believer. As a point of fact, the Negro woman was not a part of the demonstrative class; and the reason for (the Prophet's) decision is that that kind of people, who does not give their consent but for the help of their imaginative faculty—since they transfigure everything through imagination—, has difficulty in recognising the existence of beings which are not in some way connected to something they can imagine.

This category also includes those who cannot conceive (God) without putting him in connection with some place; they are those who have only slightly surpassed the lowest degree of knowledge, staying bound to a concept of divine corporeality.⁵¹

⁵¹ I do not accept the variation in Hourani 1959, p. 25, note 223, taken up also by Geoffroy p. 143, and accepted here also by 'Amāra, which introduces a negative connotation with the interpretation *bi-inkār* and translates (Hourani 1976, p. 60): "[by rejecting] belief in corporality", because it seems to me less consistent with the logic development of the discussion. The text could be amended with *fī naẓar i'tiqād al ǧismiyya*. Alonso 1947, p. 184, translates: "Estos con relación a los de la primera clase, avanzan un poco en la especulación y admiten la corporeidad". Also

In conclusion, the most appropriate answer for them, concerning these expressions, is that they are ambiguous, so a full stop must be set after the Most High's words: "True interpretation... is known by God alone". Even those belonging to the demonstrative class, despite agreeing on that (ambiguous texts) must be interpreted, yet do not at all agree on the interpretations to suggest, and this in connection with the degree of demonstrative knowledge each of them has achieved.

There is then a third category of religious texts that is placed between the two former ones,⁵² about which it is licit to nourish some doubts. They are the texts to which some of those committed to the speculative study attribute an evident meaning, impossible to interpret, while others find a hidden meaning, which is impossible to grasp by the learned through a merely exoteric reading. Such a divergence depends on the obscurity and duplicity (of those texts); and who, among the learned, should commit mistakes (in interpreting them) is excused anyhow.

If somebody objected now: it is clear that religious Law provides for three levels (of approach) to these questions, but which of the three is according to you (philosophers) the most convenient for the future life and its states?—we would answer: it is a problem which, evidently, belongs to the kind about which there are wide divergences. There are for instance scholars who think themselves as being demonstrative, like the Aš'arite,⁵³ who endorse the neces-

Butterworth, p. 20, does not accept the addition *bi-inkār* and translates: "who in their reflection have moved somewhat beyond the rank of the first sort's belief in corporeality".

⁵² That is between that of the self-evident texts and that of the texts that have to be interpreted hermeneutically.

⁵³ The statement is unusual. The Aš'arites are theologians that certainly do not refuse the reason as a means of analysis of reality (cf. Leaman 2002, pp. 136, 140; Gardet-Anawati 1981, p. 57; Caspar 1987, p. 177), but they cannot be considered "rationalists" in the same way as philosophers. An Aš'arite like al-Ġazālī, who was at the same time a spiritual, a jurist, a theologian and a crypto-philosopher, very much appreciated the logic and the mathematics as tools of certainty and evidence (al-Ġazālī 1970a, pp. 92–95, al-Ġazālī 1928, pp. 11–12, but in general the whole work *Mi'yar al-'ilm* or *The Criterion of the Science*), but he maintains an ambiguous

sity to interpret (the texts about future life) in their literal meaning, as there exists no demonstrative evidence inducing to refuse such literal sense; whereas others deem it necessary to suggest an interpretation employing demonstration, even if they then greatly differ concerning the kind of interpretation to formulate. Abū Ḥāmid (al-Ġazālī) belongs to this second group, together with many other *ṣūfī* (mystics); and some of them, as precisely Abū Ḥāmid does in his books, feature two different (opposing) interpretations of the same topic.

It is acknowledgeable that the one among the learned who errs about these questions be pardoned, while, if he is right, he will be thanked and rewarded; yet he must accept the real existence (of the Hereafter), however, and, even if he subjected all that is interpretable to interpretation, for instance the way of existing of the Hereafter, he would not be able to deny its actual reality. Such a conclusion would indeed be unbelief, since future life is a part of the fundamental principles of religion, and to it one must necessarily give his consent, according to the three paths we have already specified common to “the white and the black”.⁵⁴

attitude towards theology, which he often judges as a purely controversialist discipline, sometimes even claiming that true science comes from God’s illumination (al-Ġazālī 1970a, p. 85). It seems likely to me that Averroes’s goal is to display a formal reverence towards a prestigious and “orthodox” theological current—even if not always well accepted in the Maġreb and in Andalusia—, in order to highlight how “rationalism” is not unknown and unfamiliar among the classic Islamic *Kalām*.

⁵⁴ About the problem of future life, the *Decisive Treatise* does not adopt, overall, an established position. Averroes seems to say, on the one hand, that it is necessary to believe in some sort of physical dimension of the afterlife, since it is in that direction that Scriptures move, and to Scriptures one must give an obligatory and generalised consent. On the other hand, however, denying a spiritual dimension of the afterlife impoverishes and degrades human life. In the *Kitāb al-Kaṣf ‘an Manāhiġ al-Adilla* (Hourani 1976, pp. 76 ff. e Alonso 1947, pp. 346 ff.), Averroes takes up the problem anew, claiming that Islamic scholars greatly differ in the way of symbolising future life. Moreover, he identifies three “sects”: one, that we would consider “materialistic” and that clearly corresponds to the populace, identifies the joys of the afterlife with those of worldly life; a second one, that clearly is that of philosophers, considers that heavenly joys are

purely spiritual; a third one, that should be that of theologians, considers Heaven as material, but of a different materiality from the earthly one (in fact, al-Ġazālī considered a physical resurrection of the bodies undeniable, even if Heaven can certainly not be compared to a beautiful garden rich in rivers and plants). Averroes gives good evidence of his flawed position. Indeed, first of all he claims that it is the third hypothesis, and not the second one, to be more convenient to the *élite*; he then affirms that “the duty of man is to adhere to the conclusions he reaches through the studies”; lastly, he highlights how the Qurʾān does not allow doubts concerning the immortality and the spirituality of the soul, but he also compares the state of death with that of the sleep, during which the biological and material functions of life are like suspended, but not annihilated. In the *Incoherence of the Incoherence* (Averroes 1930, pp. 585–587, Averroes 1997 p. 532 ff.) Averroes discusses once again about the immortality of the soul and he approves of the Islamic point of view that, in his opinion, would consider the afterlife a middle way between pure materiality and pure spirituality. Indeed, “concluding that the soul is immortal cannot be avoided, as it is easy to prove both rationally and from a religious point of view, and that what rises of the body is like a simulacrum of the concrete bodies, even if not properly the body itself. Indeed, what does not exist anymore cannot assume any individuality, and a thing can come back only as the image of the body that perished, as al-Ġazālī declares instead” (tr. also in Campanini 1989, pp. 100–101). Al-Ġazālī, therefore, as a theologian, is wrong in supporting a physical resurrection of the bodies adhering “literally” to the religious dogmatics; however, philosophers do not completely reject the materiality of the destiny of the soul, but they allegorise, transforming the sensitive body into a simulacrum. All of it, however, it is worth reminding, happens in the framework of the “civil” legitimisation of religion that is useful to found in order to support social order. It is very interesting to compare Avicenna’s position (Avicenna 1969) with this Averroist conception. Avicenna believes that the Scriptures speak to the uncultivated with a language accessible to them (p. 60); that is precisely why their literal meaning is not convenient to philosophers, but needs an allegorisation: “all of this is a discussion to make those who ask to be one of the *élite*, and not of the common people, understand that the literal meaning [of revealed Law] does not bring any evidence [on the problem of future life]” (p. 62). Avicenna thinks that future life consists of a spiritual pleasure and grief (p. 188) and that, in feeling an otherworldly pleasure—a mainly rational pleasure—the soul gets closer to the angels (p. 200). “Otherworldly happiness takes place when the soul frees itself from the body and from the influence of nature, and it strips itself [of the

As far as those men are concerned who do not belong to the class of the learned, for them it is obligatory to adhere to the literal sense (of the Holy Texts), because for them, in fact, interpretation is unbelief, leading them to unbelief. This is why we think that common people must believe in the literal sense, while allegorical interpretation is (for them) an authentic unbelief, leading them to unbelief. Whoever of the learned should spread interpretation with common people, would be a spreader of unbelief; and he who spreads unbelief, is a unbeliever himself.

Therefore, it is necessary that only the books written in a demonstrative style should contain interpretations, as these books are read only by those who are experts in demonstration. While if (interpretations) are contained in non-demonstrative books and they are employed for legal, rhetorical or dialectic reasonings, as does Abū Hāmid (al-Ġazālī), a severe mistake is committed both towards religious Law and towards philosophy, even if the intention is good. Indeed, even if one wanted to multiply the number of the learned, what one would end up with would be to actually multiply the number of the ignorant! The result thereof would be that some would discredit philosophy, others religious Law, and others again would try to synthesise them together. This seems to be one of the main purposes of (al-Ġazālī's) books; the demonstration of how he aimed at urging the natural dispositions⁵⁵ (of the individual

body], perfect in essence, looking with an intellectual stare at the essence of the One that has the supreme power" (p. 204). It is however implied that the loftiness of rational pleasure is only proper to philosophers. Indeed, Avicenna outlines a precise hierarchy of souls and of bliss reserved for them, which, of course, are inferior for common people or for children having died before becoming adults or for fools to those of perfect and purified souls, as, no doubt, are those of saints and philosophers (pp. 208–212).

⁵⁵ Hourani 1976, p. 61, Butterworth (Averroes 2001, p. 22) translate "minds"; Alonso 1947, p. 186: "espiritus"; Geoffroy: "ésprits". The Arabic has: *fiṭar*, plural of *fiṭra*. Van Den Bergh (in Averroes 1954, note 8.3, p. 7 of the "Notes") translates the term as "sound understanding" corresponding to the stoic *orthôs lōgos*. However, (see Abdou 1973, *sub indice*) *fiṭra* has often, in Averroes' language, also the meaning of "instinct", "attitude", "natural gift". Butterworth remembers that the Arabic expression

readers) is that he did not adhere completely to any doctrine, but he professed himself Aš'arite with the Aš'arite, mystic with the *ṣūfī*, philosopher with philosophers. The distich perfectly suits him:⁵⁶

One day as a Yemenite, if I meet a Yemenite, and one day as
an 'Adnānī, if I meet a Ma'addī.

Actually, it would be indispensable for Muslim chiefs to prohibit the reading of his (al-Ġazālī's) books containing elements of science, except to those who are expert in science. Analogously, the chiefs of the Muslims must prohibit all books containing demonstrative reasonings, except to those who are trained in this type of argumentation. However, the evil inherent in philosophical books is lighter (than that inherent in books mixing demonstration and dialectics) because these books are taken up, in the majority of cases, only by people who have a natural attitude to benefit thereof; and those can be misled only by the lack of moral virtues or rather by readings performed without a method or without the guide of suitable teachers. To prohibit philosophical books absolutely means, on the other hand, to hinder the way religious Law itself actually pointed out, since it would be an unfair action towards the best kind of men and living beings.

It is a fact of justice towards the most outstanding of existing beings to have their worth acknowledged only by those who are ready to grant that acknowledgement, namely the most outstanding kind of men.⁵⁷ And the existing being is the nobler, the greater the offence made to him not knowing him properly. Therefore, did the Most High say: "Idolatry is the highest unfairness" (Q. 31:13).

means literally: "innate dispositions". I do not see then why to change the literal meaning, provided that the term *fiṭra* is a pregnant Qur'ānic word (Q. 30:30), and that Averroes is trying to make his ideas palatable to theologians.

⁵⁶ By 'Imrān Ibn Ḥittān, cf. Hourani 1976, p. 107, note 145

⁵⁷ Of course, by excellent species of existing beings Averroes means God, angels, intellects; and as excellent species of men, philosophers. The latter are inexcusable if they do not know (demonstratively) God, because they cause offence to the noblest and greatest of beings.

This is what we thought we had to highlight analytically, namely (the possibility) of a dialogue⁵⁸ between religious Law and philosophy, and the conditions (of lawfulness) of the interpretation of Scriptures. If it were not for the spread these problems have experienced with common people, we would never have dared writing about it; nor would we have needed to apologise with “insiders”, since the kind of questions we have tackled is (usually) discussed in philosophy books.

God is the guide and He who guarantees achievement of truth.

II

Know that the purpose of religious Law is to teach true knowledge and rightful behaviour.⁵⁹ True knowledge is that of God, praised and exalted, and of the (nature) of existing things as they are—especially of the noblest among them—, and the knowledge of happiness and misery awaiting us in the Hereafter. Rightful behaviour consists of acting so as to attain happiness and avoid misery.

The knowledge of these acts is defined as practical science, and it is divided in two parts: the science of external or bodily acts, which is also called jurisprudence; and the science of interior acts like thankfulness (towards God), patience and other moral acts which have been made obligatory or prohibited by religious Law.

⁵⁸ Hourani 1976, p. 62, translates: “correspondence”; Alonso 1947, p.187, “relaciones”. But it seems to me an interpretative stretch in a concordistic way, where Averroes uses the term *takallum* that derives from the verb *takallama*, “to dialogue”, “to talk”. Geoffroy: “discours”; Butterworth “discussion”.

⁵⁹ This statement, besides being rigorously philosophical, coordinating metaphysics and ethics, is, according to Urvoy 1991, p.19, attributable to the Almohad ideology: “Almohadism was a synthesis of a theology, grounded on the analysis of the problem of inference and on the assumption of the existence of an Absolute Being, with a practical philosophy naturally consistent with Islamic Law and based on the notion of divine transcendence. From this the division derives between the sphere of faith, which was purely rational, and that of practice, which relies almost entirely on positive methods”.

Such is the science called “ascetism” or “of future life”. Abū Ḥāmid (al-Ġazālī) dedicated himself to it in his book *The Revival of Religious Sciences*, where he describes how men must give up (the things of the world) and how they must point at (future life). These (behaviours) permit one to achieve that devotion to God which is the cause of happiness.⁶⁰ But let’s now get back to our topic, from which we have moved too far away.

The aim of the Law is to teach truth and rightful behaviour, and that teaching, as was highlighted by logicians, is of two kinds: either pertaining to concepts or pertaining to judgments. Now, the methods of judging which are available to men are three: demonstrative, dialectic and rhetorical; while the methods to form concepts are two: either one conceives the thing in itself or through one of its symbols.

It is not really in anyone’s nature to master the demonstrative method, nor the dialectic, since to learn the contents of the demonstration is difficult, and even those who are qualified to do so need much time. Hence, as the purpose of the Law is to educate masses,

⁶⁰ It is al-Ġazālī’s “practical” science, as he outlines in the framework of the mystical path towards God (cf. Campanini 1991), both in the *Iḥyāʾ* (al-Ġazālī 1985) and in the *Arbaʿīn* (al-Ġazālī 1970b). The ten stages bringing to God and, after death, to afterworldly happiness are, in the corresponding works:

<i>Iḥyāʾ</i>	<i>Arbaʿīn</i>
1) Repentance	1) Repentance
2) Patience and gratitude	2) Fear of God
3) Fear of God and hope	3) Asceticism
4) Poverty and asceticism	4) Patience
5) The Oneness of God and the abandon to him	5) Gratitude (to God)
6) Love, familiarity, and being content with God’s decree	6) Sincerity and sincere worship
7) Intention and sincerity	7) Abandon to God
8) Control and soul searching	8) Love
9) Meditation	9) Being content with God’s decree
10) Death and afterlife.	10) The memory of death.

As can be seen, besides some “shifts”, the mystical *iter* outlined by al-Ġazālī in the two pieces of work is substantially identical. On this subject, the *Balance of action* can also be read (al-Ġazālī 2005).

it is necessary for the Law to contain all possible methods to judge and to formulate concepts.

There are then methods of judgment which are common to the majority of men, namely the rhetorical and the dialectical—the rhetorical is even more general than the dialectical—and a specific method for a narrower circle of individuals, namely the demonstrative. As the main purpose of Scriptures is to take care of the majority, without neglecting the *élite* though, the (epistemologically) predominant methods in the field of religion are those proper to the majority, in order to formulate both judgments and concepts.

In general, methods applicable to the study of religion can be subdivided into four kinds.

The first is grounded on a common method that attains certain concepts and judgments, in spite of their rhetoric and dialectic origin. The syllogisms deriving thereof, though consisting of currently known and accepted (ideas), start from certain premises⁶¹ and achieve conclusions that must be accepted without symbolisations. They are, in brief, those statements of the religious Law which do not imply the *ta'wil* or interpretation; and those who put them in question or, precisely, interpret them (trespassing the literal sense) are to be considered unbelievers.

The second type of method is the one starting from premises which, even though they consist in currently known and accepted (ideas), are certain, while the conclusions which are expected to be achieved are symbolical. This method applies to statements whose *ta'wil* is licit, at least as far as the conclusions are concerned.

The third type is opposite to the second: its conclusions are precisely those which the research is aiming at, and its premises are

⁶¹ Arabic: *ḥaḍīḥi'l-maqāyis biya al-maqāyis allati 'araḍa li-muqaddimātihā ma'a kawwihā maḥḥuratan aw maẓnūnan an takūn yaqīniyyatan*. Hourani 1976, p. 64, means 'araḍa as "are accidentally certain" (analogously Geoffroy: "certaines accidentellement"; but this sense of casualty does not seem acceptable within the framework of a refusal of the hermeneutic interpretation. Alonso 1947, p. 190, translates more linearly: "Son éstos los razonamientos cuyas premisas, aunque sean solo de sentido común... son ciertas y además sus consecuencias son admisibles in si mismos...". Butterworth. "whose premises happen to be certain, even though they are generally accepted or suppositional".

commonly known and accepted, despite not necessarily being certain. It is a type of method whose conclusions do not imply the *ta'wīl*, while some interpretation can be performed on the premises.

The fourth type is that in which premises are known and accepted, even though they are not certain, and in which the expected conclusions are symbolical. Statements deriving herefrom must be the object of interpretation by the *élite*, while it is the duty of the masses to stop at their literal sense.⁶²

In general, all that of these (statements) requires an interpretation, which can only be understood by a demonstrative way, and it is a precise duty of the *élite* to engage therein. On the other hand, it is the duty of the masses to take them according to their literal sense, both as far as concepts and as far as judgments are concerned, since the nature of masses is not capable of overcoming the (exoteric) level.

Scholars of religious Law sometimes happen to formulate interpretations because of the greater ability of one of the usual (inquiry) tools compared to another to produce consent: for instance, in case the interpretation gives globally more complete and persuasive directions than the literal sense. They are widespread interpretations, and it may be that (knowing them) is due for those who have a reasoning ability reaching the dialectic level. Some of the Aš'arite' and the Mu'tazilites'⁶³ theories belong to this type of in-

⁶² In short, as already said on pages 29–30 of the *Introduction*:

a) from sure premises to sure conclusions (no possible allegorical interpretation);

b) from sure premises to symbolic conclusions (subject to allegorical interpretation);

c) from commonly-believed premises, but not sure (subject to allegorical interpretation), to sure conclusions;

d) from commonly-believed premises, but not sure, to symbolic conclusions whose allegorical interpretation is *compulsory* for philosophers.

As can be seen, nevertheless, Averroes unfortunately does not put forward explanatory models of these four methods in the *Decisive Treatise*.

⁶³ The Mu'tazila is considered by many, without entirely good reasons, as the most rationalistic of the classical Islamic theological currents. It flourished in Iraq in the 9th century, mainly in Baghdad and Basra, and its theological principles are substantially opposite to the Aš'arite ones (cf.

terpretation, even though Muʿtazilites are much more rigorous in their statements. As far as the masses are concerned, though, whose abilities do not go beyond the rhetorical level, their duty is to stay faithful to the literal sense, because it is absolutely illicit that they learn some of the non-literal meanings.

Hence, in connection with religious Law, men are divided into three groups: the first, to whom the interpretation does not fit at all, consists of the greatest majority of people, which is suited for rhetorical argumentation. No man gifted with intellect may refuse to consent to this kind of argumentation.

The second group is that which benefits of dialectic interpretation: and dialectic, one becomes either by nature or by nature and education. The third group is that of true interpretation: they are the demonstrative people, who are such out of their natural dispo-

the previous note 26). The main ones are the so-called “five principles” (*al-uṣūl al-ḥamsa*): a) God does not have real attributes, separated from his essence (al-Aṣʿarī will accuse the Muʿtazilites of *taʿṭīl*, that is of depriving God of concrete reality in order to make him absolutely “abstract”: in fact, for the Muʿtazilites, conferring on God attributes separated from the essence is sinning by polytheism, indeed it would mean considering them as many gods); b) man is totally free and responsible for his actions and he has the possibility of choosing between good and evil; c) God *must* punish the evil and reward the good, otherwise He would be unjust; consequently, He is obliged to make “the best” for creatures; d) the sinner lies halfway between faith and unbelief, he cannot be properly considered neither a believer nor an infidel; e) the true believer has to defend his faith at the risk of his own life and he has to strive to prevent the realisation of evil. From a political point of view, a number of Muʿtazilites had ʿAlid tendencies, if not even Shiite: but the argument is too complex to be addressed here in detail. The Muʿtazilism became official theology of the Islamic empire under the caliphate of the ʿAbbāsīd al-Maʾmūn (*reigned* 813–833) and even an inquisitorial court (the *miḥna*) was organised to impose their theology—especially the doctrine of the created Qurʾān - on the other reluctant doctors of the Law. Among the main persecuted individuals, the often mentioned Ibn Ḥanbal. A distinctive Muʿtazilite doctrine, besides the previous “five principles”, was exactly that of the “created” Qurʾān: it would not be, as stated by Aṣʿarites, a “Word” coeternal with God, but one of his “productions”, like the world and the things. Cf. for a general overview Campanini 2012.

sition or out of training in the art of philosophy. The interpretation this latter group suggests must not be communicated to the dialectic, far less to the masses.

If these interpretations are shared with someone who is not able to comprehend them, especially if they are demonstrative conclusions far away from common sense, both the interpreter and the receiver of the interpretation are led to unbelief. The cause thereof lies in the fact that the (interpreter's) purpose is the refusal of the literal sense and the imposition of interpretation: therefore, if the literal sense is destroyed in the mind of those who can understand that only, without being able to simultaneously welcome the interpretation, they are led to unbelief especially if the principles of religion are being discussed.

Thus, interpretations must not be revealed to the masses, neither including them in rhetorical nor in dialectical texts, as Abū Ḥāmid (al-Ġazālī) did in both cases. To the masses (I will repeat) these things must not be commented. And when it is claimed that the literal sense of a proposition may or may not be evident to the masses in itself, that is, whether it needs an interpretation the masses cannot achieve, it is concluded that the interpretation of this proposition is known to God alone. In these cases, it is necessary to put a full stop after the Sublime Powerful's words: "The true interpretation of those passages is known but to God". The same kind of attitude must be reserved to those abstruse questions that the masses are not able to understand, according to the Most High's words: "They shall ask you about the Spirit. Answer: the Spirit (proceeds) from my Lord's order, but you have been endowed with but a little science" (Q. 17:85).

Then, he who spreads interpretations to the people who are not ready to receive them is an unbeliever who incites unbelief. And this is exactly the opposite of what the Supreme Legislator meant to do, particularly when the interpretations cause the perversion of the principles of religion. Some people in fact behave like that nowadays, and we have verified that these people mistakenly believe themselves to be just like philosophers and, with their un-

sual⁶⁴knowledge, they achieve conclusions totally in disagreement with religious Law about all issues, especially those which do not admit of an allegorical interpretation. (Naturally), these individuals (claim) that it is necessary to spread these conclusions to the masses. Convinced thereof, they become propagandists with the common people of beliefs which induce perversion and cause perdition to the masses and to themselves, both in this and in the next world.

The purpose of those (pretending to reveal to the masses the meanings hidden in the Scriptures) and God's end are explained in the following apologue. Let's imagine a man who goes to a skilled doctor. The doctor's purpose is to preserve his patients' health and eliminate illnesses. So he prescribes his patients the rules they must follow and the obligatory use of medicines that preserve their health and cure them from disease and avoid the opposite. And it is not possible for the patients to become doctors themselves, as only the doctor demonstratively knows the way to preserve health and eliminate pathologies. Now, he (who wants to reveal to the masses the meanings hidden in the Scriptures) is like that who hinders patients and tells them: "Look, what your doctor has prescribed to you is wrong", frustrating thus the usefulness of therapies. (Out of metaphor), he is like the one who presents the masses with interpretations that they are not able to understand nor to which they can consent. Do you believe that a patient like the one I have described (after the bad advisor's warnings) will behave in such a way as to safeguard his health and keep diseases off? Or do you believe that such a bad advisor will be able, after having destroyed the patients' trust in the doctor's therapies, to cure them himself? Of course not, he will not be able to do so; neither will patients be able to cure themselves, so they will all die.

This would happen to the populace also if correct interpretations were spread about (theological) problems, because they would not be able to understand them. Even worse if the interpretation were wrong, because that would cause the populace not to

⁶⁴ Arabic: *ʿaḡība*. Hourani 1976, p. 66, translates "remarkable"; Alonso 1947, p. 193, "maravillosa"; Geoffroy: "merveilleuse"; Butterworth: "astounding". I perceive, in Averroes' words, a certain degree of irony.

acknowledge that there is a health to be preserved and a disease that must be cured, and that there are means by which health can be preserved and disease kept off. The behaviour of those who spread interpretations with the masses and with those who do not belong to the “insiders” concerning religious Law, corrupts the very religious Law and diverts from it; and whoever diverts from the acceptance of religious Law is an unbeliever.

(The doctor’s) apologue expresses a truth; the point is not a mere poetic metaphor, as someone might object. It describes, indeed, an authentic analogy, since the doctor’s relationship with the body health is identical to the Legislator’s relationship to the soul health. The doctor is the one who tries to preserve the bodies health when they are healthy, and to restore it when they are ill; the Legislator does the same as far as the souls well-being is concerned, which can also be defined as “fear of God”.⁶⁵ Indeed the Holy Book, in several verses, incites us to practice fear of God with acts complying with religious Law; for instance the Most High said: “Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those who were before you, in the hope that you may become God-fearing” (Q. 2:183), and: “Surely their blood and their flesh do not reach God, but your fear surely reaches God” (Q. 22:37); and also: “Prayer preserves from turpitude and from evil” (Q. 29:45); and many others of the same tone. The Supreme Legislator, with the knowledge and the practice of religion, has tried to guarantee the (spiritual) health, which, in turn, guarantees bliss in the afterlife, while the opposite produces affliction and suffering in the afterlife.

From what has been said it must then appear clear that it is obligatory to avoid inserting interpretations—even if correct ones—in books addressing the masses; worse even if they are in-

⁶⁵ Arabic: *taqwā*, with the Latin meaning of *pietas*. Hourani 1976, p. 67, translates “fear of God”; more flexible Alonso 1947, p. 195: “piedad o temor de Dios” and Geoffroy: “piété révérencieuse”; Butterworth: “piety”. The term is Qur’ānic, and it appears several times in the Holy Book: for example, in Q. 2:197, where Zilio Grandi translates “timore (fear)”; or in Q. 5:8, where Bausani translates “pietà (piety)”.

correct. A true interpretation represents an element of certainty,⁶⁶ with which man has been charged with and takes charge of because the other existing beings have avoided the burden thereof, as the Most High said: “We have proposed the Pledge to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, and they refused to carry it and were afraid of it. But man charged himself with it” (Q. 33:72).⁶⁷

Because of the interpretations, especially the wrong ones, and of the opinion that it would be necessary, according to religious Law, to communicate them to the masses, Islamic sects emerged, the one accusing the other of unbelief or blamable innovations. For instance, Mu‘tazilites commented upon many verses and prophetic traditions and spread their hermeneutics with the masses; and Aš‘arites did the same, even though less frequently. As a consequence of this, they cast men into hate and mutual war, tearing up the unity of the Law and provoking deep divisions in the population.

Let it be added that the method they pursued to enunciate the interpretations was not appropriate for masses nor for the elite. Not for masses, because their argumentations were much more difficult than the one commonly in use; not for the elite, as such argumentations, if examined in depth by an expert, turn out to be lacking of demonstrative strength. Furthermore, many of the principles on which Aš‘arites grounded their knowledge were sophistic, going as far as denying many necessary (philosophical) truths: for instance, the permanence of accidents; the mutual influence of

⁶⁶ Arabic: *amāna*. Hourani 1976, p. 68: “true allegory is the deposit...”; Butterworth: “deposit”; Alonso 1947, p. 195: “depósito”; Geoffroy: “depot”. The Dictionary Wehr Cowan (p. 29) gives as first meaning “reliability, trustworthiness”. I translated “certainty” according to what already said in the “Introduction”: by “allegorical interpretations” Averroes mainly means the demonstrative conclusions grounded on philosophy, which induce “certainty”.

⁶⁷ I have reported the whole verse, while Averroes merely mentions it. The term translated by Zilio Grandi with “pledge” is again *amāna*. Elsewhere, in the Qur’ān, the term has the juridical meaning of “mutual guarantee” (Q. 2:283) or “trusted deposits (Q. 4:58). For the meaning of “trust”, cf. Q. 8:27.

things; the existence of causes that provoke effects; the substantial forms; the second causes.

Some theoreticians,⁶⁸ following this setting up, assumed a hostile position towards Muslims: thus, there is an Aš'arite sect accusing of unbelief anyone not attaining the acknowledgement of the Creator's existence—praise be on Him!—by the argumentations contained in the books composed by them to this purpose. Yet indeed it is them who are unbelievers and corrupted! From here on, they differentiate themselves saying that: “the most necessary of things is rational study”; or, on the contrary, “it is pure faith”; this (happens) because they do not know which are the (argumentative) methods sharable by men, the methods thanks to which religious Law incites all (to adhere to its truths). On the contrary, they object that there is only one method, and in this way they misunderstand the aims of the Supreme Legislator and they mislead themselves and their neighbour.

Now, should somebody object:⁶⁹ If the methods employed by Aš'arites and other (orthodox) scholars are not those commonly sharable—namely those thanks to which the Legislator wanted to teach the masses and without which it is not possible to perform that teaching—which will then be the methods admitted by our religious Law? We would answer: they are the methods exclusively provided in the Holy Book. If examined carefully, it shows it contains all three methods suitable for the (various categories) of men; and the commonly sharable ways are such that one can proceed

⁶⁸ The Arabic is *nuzziār*. Alonso 1947, p. 196, says bluntly: “teólogos”; Geoffroy: “penseurs spéculatifs”; Butterworth: “those who reflect”.

⁶⁹ The objection is delicate because it concerns the universality of religious education. Averroes answers in an “orthodox” way: the obliged reference point for a universal faith, that involves the common people, theologians and philosophers, is the Qur’ān. The Qur’ān, however, is considered at once as a rhetoric, dialectic and demonstrative book, and therefore it is rich not only in apodeictic truths, but in myths and simplifying and naive images. In this way, Averroes could be accused of compromising on the sanctity of the text: and it is precisely this disrespectfulness towards the revealed character of the Scriptures that al-Ġazālī, among other things, reproached philosophers with.

and teach both to the masses and the *élite*.⁷⁰ If the question is considered carefully,⁷¹ it is evident that no methods to educate the masses better than those mentioned in the Qur'ān can be found.

And those who alter them using an interpretation which is not evident in itself or (deemed) more greatly evident with masses—yet this (alleged) greater evidence is unconceivable—indeed to undermine the Qur'ān's wisdom⁷² and to undermine its purpose to benefit human happiness. This appears manifest if the genuine way (of behaving) of the first (Muslims) is compared to that of those who came after them. Indeed, the first (Muslims) gained perfect excellence and fear of God adhering to Qur'ānic dictates without advancing any interpretation of them; and if by chance they interpreted, surely they did not spread their conclusions. Their successors, on the contrary, made use of interpretation; they weakened their fear of God and increased the inner dissent; their mutual love vanished and sects have multiplied.

It is necessary, for anyone who wants to eliminate these dangerous innovations of the Law, to lever the Holy Book up, extract from it the directions contained therein regarding all things that we have the juridical obligation⁷³ to believe, and make an effort to study their apparent sense whenever possible, without demanding to give an interpretation thereof, unless that interpretation does not

⁷⁰ Arabic: *akṭar al-nās wa'l-ḥassa*. Alonso 1947, p. 197: “mayoría... *espiritus electos*”. Oddly Hourani 1976, p. 69: “the majority of the people and the special method” (but Butterworth: “...the select (people)”). Geoffroy: “l'enseignement du plus grand nombre, et les [procédés] particuliers”.

⁷¹ Another odd translation of Hourani, p. 69: “if their merits [?] are inspected”; simply Butterworth: “if the matter is examined in respect to them”. Geoffroy: “Et si l'on songe à ce qu'il en est...”.

⁷² The term used is *ḥikma*, and, in this context, it is very meaningful. Certainly here, with regard to the Qur'ān, it means wisdom, but let me remind that Averroes uses it in the *Treatise* to indicate philosophy! Thus, it is as if he made philosophy coincide with Qur'ānic wisdom.

⁷³ Averroes uses the verb *kallafa* (cf. previous note 47). I have intensified in this way the trans. that in Hourani 1976, p. 70, is only “it obliges us to believe”. Butterworth: “responsible for believing”. Geoffroy: “nous sommes chargés [par la Loi]...”.

assert itself because it appears immediately evident to all. Indeed, if the useful statements contained in the Law to educate the masses are examined thoroughly, it seems that through them⁷⁴ a limit of literal evidence is reached which, as far as what is not at all evident, must not be overcome but by a (philosopher) who employs demonstration. Such peculiarity cannot be found elsewhere.

The principles of the religious Law that the Holy Book makes manifest to the masses, have three characteristics that demonstrate its miraculous inimitability: the first is that there do not exist principles compelling to a fuller and more complete consent and adherence by everyone (of the men); the second is that they are a natural means to individualise that limit beyond which the interpretation—if an interpretation is even permissible—is reserved for the demonstrative philosophers, the third is that they contain indications addressed to those able to formulate a true interpretation (in order to make them engage in it). But this ability is found neither among the Aš‘arites nor among the Mu‘tazilites, whose interpretations are not useful at all, neither do they include clear indications of the truth, nor are they true. This is why the dangerous innovations multiplied!

Had I the strength and the ability to commit myself to a similar task, and had God granted me sufficient life, it would be my wish to work intensively on this,⁷⁵ as far as it would seem manageable and it was useful to those who will come after me. Indeed,

⁷⁴ Arabic: *min nuṣratihā*, which Hourani translates with “in mastering their meaning”; Butterworth: “reaches the point”; Alonso 1947, p.198, with “fuerza persuasiva”; Geoffroy: “se montrent si convaincants...”. In my opinion, Averroes wants to say that the Qur‘ān itself contains clear invitations not to allegorise, therefore “through its mean (help)” it is possible to confirm what the philosopher is saying.

⁷⁵ According to Hourani 1976, notes 194 and 186, Averroes would herald here the composition of the *Kitāb al-Kaṣf ‘an Manābiḡ al-Adilla*. More in general, according to Alonso 1947, p. 199, Averroes would promise to prove in the future the falsity and the errors of the Mu‘tazilite and Aš‘arite theologians. In the general context, it seems to indicate a desire of the philosopher to dedicate himself to a hermeneutic interpretation of the Scriptures in order to avoid the lamenting misfortunes on which he focuses immediately thereafter.

(my) soul is embittered by deep affliction and grief for the sects that bring perversion in the religious Law and for the erroneous beliefs (that distort it), especially for those professed by men relating themselves to philosophy. Blows dealt by a friend hurt more than those dealt by an enemy: and since philosophy is a friend to religion, and is even its foster sister, the blows dealt (to religion) from those who would like to be kindred to the philosophers are more hurtful, without accounting for the enmities, the hate and the conflicts that are fanned by it. On the contrary, philosophy and religion accompany each other by nature, and by essence and inclination they mutually love each other with a deep love. Now, many ignorant friends of religion, claiming an affinity (with philosophy), damage religion itself; and this is what the (infinite) sects that exist nowadays do. But God aims⁷⁶ (at the good) for everyone and He tries to bring closer the totality (of men) to his love, bringing the hearts closer as brothers with the fear of Him and moving hate and resentment away from them, thanks to his nobility and mercy.

As a matter of fact, God has alleviated many of these sufferings and He has straightened many of these absurdities and deviations thanks to the current superior order of things.⁷⁷ Through it,

⁷⁶ Arabic: *saddada*, which, besides the meaning of “to guide, to lead in the good direction”, that is given to it by Hourani, Alonso e Geoffroy, has also the one of “to aim, to focus”. Butterworth: “God shows to people the right way”.

⁷⁷ As already said in the “Introduction” (*supra*, p. 7), I agree with the political interpretation already put forward by Rosenthal 1958 about this passage. The reference would seem, beyond any possible doubt, to the Almohad regime that Averroes considered as positive. Hourani 1976, p. 70 and Butterworth (Averroes 2001, p. 33) translate: “this triumphant rule”, and Hourani comments too (p. 116, note 196): “The Arabic term *amr* [“rule” or “order”] can be interpreted as “regime”: the sentence would then refer to the victorious dynasty of the Almohads”. Alonso, p. 199, n. 2, finds it difficult to admit that the “governor” was an enemy of the Aš‘arism of Ibn Tūmart, *mahdī* and founder of the dynasty. The passage, however, emphasises the positive method of “calling the masses to know God through the way of the middle path” and it does not imply a real suppression of Aš‘arism. In any case, it is very probable that Abū Ya‘qūb had abandoned Aš‘arite opinions because of his philosophical interests.

God has opened many ways to the good and He has especially favoured those who devote themselves to the rational study and who desire to know the true. Moreover (the current system) has called the masses to know God—praise Him!—according to a middle path,⁷⁸ which is distant from the scantiness of the blindest traditionalism, in the same way as it is sheltered from the factiousness of the theologians, and He has urged the élite to devote themselves mandatorily to the rational and complete study of the principles of religion.

Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds!⁷⁹

APPENDIX ON THE DIVINE SCIENCE

[DAMĪMA]

ON THE PROBLEM ALREADY MENTIONED BY THE ŠAYḤ ABŪ'L WALĪD IN THE “DECISIVE TREATISE”.

May God preserve your power, maintain on you His blessing and deflect from you the eye of the bad fortune!⁸⁰

[...] The “benefits” for the scientists’ and philosophers’ class can well mean the protection and the encouragement offered to them by the Almohads, and the “middle path” for the masses can well be the diffusion among the populace of the Traditions realised by the dynasty. Marrākušī reports how Abū Ya‘qūb gathered Traditions about the *ḡibād* and he dedicated them to his army”. Geoffroy translates “pouvoir vinqueur”: indeed, the allusion to the triumphing Almohad power is explicit.

⁷⁸ The Qur’ān (Q. 2: 143) says: “We have made of you a nation that follows the Middle Path”. The *medietas* in the behaviours is strongly claimed also by al-Ġazālī (cf. *The Balance of action* in al-Ġazālī 2005) and can be considered as a typical mindset of Islam (see the observations of Laoust 1983b, pp. 441–446).

⁷⁹ Hourani 1959, p. 40, n. 405, adds this possible conclusion: “The book has been concluded—praise be to God, the Lord of the worlds, and the blessing be on all his Prophets!—on the 29th day of the month of Rabī‘ the second of the year... three”. The composition of the *Decisive Treatise* is to be placed anyway around 1179–1180.

Since, because of the excellence of your intellect and the nobility of your nature, you are by far superior to those who deal with these sciences, and your careful study led you to dwell on the doubts that arise regarding the eternal knowledge (of God)—praise be upon Him!—as far as it is related to the things created by Him⁸¹—, it is imperative for us, in order to give the right worth to the truth and to end your uncertainties on the topic, solve these

⁸⁰ It is obviously almost certain that the auspicious expressions are addressed to the Almohad dynasty and to its philosophical inclined princes. From the context, it emerges anyway that the *Ḍamīma* or “Appendix” was composed as a note or a working document intended for a private and restricted circulation. Alonso 1947, pp. 356–365, translates the *Ḍamīma*; however, not from the Arabic original, but rather from the very liberal version that appears in the *De pugio fidei* by Ramón Martí, an apologetic volume of Christianity against Jews and Muslims, composed around 1278. Geoffroy does not translate the *Ḍamīma* while Butterworth encloses the Arabic Text.

⁸¹ The problem addressed in the *Ḍamīma* is that of the knowledge of the particulars by God, which according to al-Ġazālī was denied by philosophers, who, in this way, become unbelievers (cf. *supra* note 38). It is true that Avicenna supports this theory (cf. Leaman 2002 and Gardet 1951, pp. 71–85), but the fact that God does not know the particulars is a direct effect of his absolute Uniqueness and transcendence. God is too high and “different” from the creation and from the attributes of the contingent beings to be able to perceive, with his eternal and perfect knowledge, the minutiae of a reality infinitely far from Him.

In this regard, in the *Incoherence of the incoherence* (Averroes 1930, p. 339; tr. Averroes 1997, p. 334), Averroes assumes, as usual with him, a Solomonic position, which still displays a certain “orthodoxy”: “God knows through a knowledge that is neither of the universals, nor of the particulars, a knowledge superior to the human one and incomprehensible to men. This means that, in connection with God, the term “knowledge” is not only incomprehensible, but even meaningless” (note of Van den Bergh, Averroes 1954, p. 203). Averroes properly says: “a knowledge of the structure and of the disposition of the world must exist by necessity that is simultaneously with the cause of this system, of the order and of the wisdom that exist in every living being; moreover, it is necessary for this intellect to be the harmony that is the cause of the perceivable harmony in existing beings. It appears impossible that this intellect knows the universals, let alone the particulars”.

doubts after having formulated them exactly. Indeed, that who does not know how the knot was tangled, cannot loosen it either.

The doubt has its own necessary logic as follows: if the objects were present in God's mind—praise be upon Him!—before existing, would they exist in the divine knowledge (right) as they are before they are translated into existence, or in a way that is different from the one that they have in the divine knowledge before being translated into existence?⁸² Now, we say: if they existed in a type of existence that is different from the one they have before being translated into existence, it would be necessary that eternal science was subject to change and that, passing from non-being to being, the objects determine (in God) an additional knowledge. But this is clearly absurd if divine knowledge is eternal.

And if we said: divine knowledge is equally unique in both ways of knowledge, it could be objected: are the objects—which are the existing brought into being—in themselves, before being created, identical to how they are when they exist? On this subject, it is necessary to answer no—that they are not in themselves, before being created, identical to how they are when they exist—otherwise being and non-being would turn out to be equivalent.

Let's assume that an opponent admitted this conclusion; we could ask him: is it perhaps not obvious that the true science is the knowledge of the existing as such? If he answered yes again, one could urge him: it is then necessary that, if the things differ in themselves one from the other, the knowledge that one has of them results equally different, because otherwise we would have a knowledge that does not correspond to the things as they are in reality. Therefore, only one solution is possible: or (eternal) science modifies itself or the objects that are brought into being are not known by it. Both of the conclusions, however, are unacceptable regarding God—praise be upon Him!

The difficulty is confirmed also by the situation of a man, whose knowledge of the non-existent is commensurate to a pre-

⁸² This means: Does God, after having created them, know the objects by the same kind of existence they have in his mind before existing, or, after they are created, does God know objects in a different way from how they were contained in his mind *ab initio*?

supposition of existence, while the knowledge of what exists is commensurate to existence itself. It is clear in itself, then, that the two ways of knowledge are different, because otherwise, in the exact moment something existed, it would be ignored.

It is not possible to avoid the dilemma with the usual answer that the *mutakallimūn* (theologians) offer, which is that the Most High would know the things before their existence exactly as they are in themselves in reality, in regards to the place, the time, and to any other specific characteristic of the existents. Indeed, it could be objected to theologians: When something is brought to existence, does it undergo or does it not undergo a modification in the moment in which it passes from non-being to being? If they answered no, they would say a huge absurdity. If they answered yes, one could continue tightening the objection to an inescapable conclusion: does eternal science perceive the change or not? It is indeed hard to hypothesise that the knowledge of something before its existence is identical to the knowledge of the same thing after it came to exist. Such is the most rigorously possible determination of the doubt in the subject, as we have already explained to you in a (previous) discussion.

And again: the solution of the problem would require a long argument, but we intend to dwell on and discuss only one crucial point. Abū Ḥāmid (al-Ġazālī) in his book about the *Incoherence (of the Philosophers)* proposes a scarcely persuasive explanation of the difficulty,⁸³ drawing up an argument on the following tenor. He claims that the knowledge and the known are strictly related; and how it can happen that one of the terms of the dyad modifies itself without the other modifying itself, seems made explicit precisely by what happens in the relationship between God's science and the known things. For the known things change, while the knowledge that God has of them does not undergo any change. An example of this could be the following. Let's suppose that one same column is located first on the right and then on the left of Zayd: he does not change in himself. The example however is not valid. Indeed, the relationship (existing between Zayd and the column) has

⁸³ Al-Ġazālī 1928, pp. 229–231 (XIII discussion). Cf. Averroes 1930, p. 459 (transl. Averroes 1997, pp. 428 ff.).

changed: from a position on the right side it has transformed to a position on the left side; what does not change is only the subject of the relationship, its bearer, that is Zayd. Being things like this, and identifying the knowledge with the relationship itself, it is necessary that the knowledge modifies itself with the transformation of the known object, in the same way as the position of the column has changed in relation to Zayd moving from the right side to the left one.⁸⁴

From our point of view, the only way to solve the difficulty is to admit that the relationship between the divine eternal knowledge and what exists is different from the relationship between a derived knowledge and the existing itself. In the second case, indeed, knowledge is the effect of the existing things, while, on the other hand, eternal science is the cause and the determining reason of the existence of the things. If an increase of the eternal knowledge occurred in the moment when something comes to exist after not

⁸⁴ Averroes means that, even if the nature of Zayd (that is, out of metaphor, God) does not change when He perceives a column first on the right and then on the left, the column has changed though (that is, the contingent object perceived by God), it has modified its state in relation to the knowing subject. So, it is possible to avoid the conclusion that the knowledge that Zayd/God has of the column when it is located on his right is different from the knowledge He has when it is located on his left. However, in my view, Averroes' objection does not seem to confute al-Ġazālī's example. Indeed, also the column does not change in itself and it does not modify its own substantial characteristics. Therefore, if it is two meters tall and it has a Corinthian capitol, it will remain two meters tall and with a Corinthian capitol both if it is located on Zayd's right and if it is located on his left (or behind and in front of him). This is, indeed, what al-Ġazālī intended to prove, which is that the way of a thing to exist is identical—in connection to the knowledge which God has of it—before or after the creation: God's knowledge does not change, even if the thing changes or passes from not-being to being.

Probably, Averroes would have had more success if he had claimed that God's knowledge is instantaneous in the present and in the future, i. e. it is released from the temporal determining of things. In which case Zayd/God would know the column *simultaneously* while it is located on the right or on the left. This is, indeed, the "philosophical" answer that was given to al-Ġazālī by Avicenna.

having been, analogously to how it happens for human knowledge, then it would also be necessary for eternal science to be the effect and not the cause of what exists. In it, therefore, there cannot occur any modification, as it instead happens to the derived knowledge (of man). The error is the result of the (undue) analogy that is drawn between eternal knowledge and human knowledge, namely between something that is concealed and something that is apparent: a comparison whose faultiness is well known. And as in the agent no change is determined in the moment in which its effect comes to exist, unless this change had not already happened before (the act), so in (God's) eternal science—praise be on Him!—no modification occurs in the moment in which the object known to it is produced.

The difficulty is therefore solved, and there is no necessity (to admit) that, since no change occurs in eternal science, (God) does not know the existing as such in the moment in which it comes to exist. Instead it results necessary that God does not know by a derived science, but by an eternal science. The determining of a change in the knowledge, while what exists is modified, is the condition of the fact that knowledge is the effect of what exists—and such is indeed the derived knowledge (proper of man).

Thus, divine eternal science is related to existing beings in a totally different way from human derived knowledge. But this does not mean at all that there do not exist (any) connection, which is instead the unfair accusation that is addressed to philosophers! They are blamed, in the framework of our problem, of claiming that God—praise be on Him!—does not know the particulars. But the matter is not in these terms, because philosophers simply claim that God does not know the particulars through a derived science, whose condition (of existence) is the coming to exist of the particulars themselves. Indeed, God's science is the cause of the particulars and not their effect, as it happens in the case of (human) derived science. This is one of the meanings of the "transcendence"⁸⁵ that necessarily is attributed to God.

⁸⁵ Arabic: *ḥaḍa ḥuwa ǧāyat al-tanzīh alladī yaǧīb an yu^c tarafa bihi*. Butterworth translates: "This is the ultimate in removing imperfections [from God] that is obligatory to acknowledge". Hourani 1976, p. 75, translates

The demonstration concludes that God knows all things being the source of their (existence) through his knowledge of them; and actually, He knows them not only for the attribute of existence, but also for the attribute of knowledge. And this is consonant with the

in an extremely twisted way: "This is the furthest extent to which purification (of concepts) ought to be admitted". The knot is in the meaning to be given to the word *tanẓīh*, that, notoriously, in the Islamic theological language, indicates mainly the "transcendence" of God (Gardet-Anawati 1981, pp. 48, 56–57) and consequently the removal from His essence of all imperfections. In this context, God's loftiness justifies the total difference between his way of knowing and the one of man. Hourani's translation can be justified in the light of a passage of the *Incoherence of the Incoherence* (Averroes 1930, p. 227; tr. Averroes 1997, p. 248), where Averroes writes: "The meaning of the [philosophers'] words, that [the intellect] does not think the existents that are inferior to it, is that it does not think them in the same way that we [men] think them, but in a way that is not comparable to the one of any other thinking being. Indeed, if another existent could think [the existents] in the way in which the intellect thinks them, it would participate in God's knowledge, and God is too high for all of this. This [the capability of knowing the things in a different way from the human one] is one of God's peculiar qualities, and for this reason some theologians affirm that God, besides the seven attributes that belong to Him, owns another one that is peculiar to Him". It is necessary, with regards to this passage, to read the note of Averroes' translator 1954, S. Van den Bergh (section "Notes", p. 88): "Averroes refers here to the theory originally formulated by the Mu'tazilite Abū Hāšim... that God possesses a positive quality that characterises him, his being God, his Divinity (*ilāhiyya*). Other theologians (such as Rāzī) deny this assumption and apply to God the method of negation, or *tanẓīh* (literally "removal", but the word is the exact translation of the Greek term *afairesis*), which means that they assert that God must be described negatively". Now, leaving aside the complex issue of "negative" or apophatic theology in the *mutakallimūn*, which is the (widely shared, also in the West, by many thinkers including Augustine) principle that about God one can only say *what He is not*, it is likely that Hourani, translating the Arabic sentence that we are discussing, interpreted *tanẓīh* as meaning *afairesis*. This last term is used by Aristotle to indicate the *abstraction*, which justifies the conversion of *tanẓīh* as "purification of concepts". If the hypothesis is correct, we might conclude that Hourani gives *tanẓīh* a prevailing "philosophical" nuance, while I have preferred a "theological" nuance.

words of the Most High: “How could not He, who created everything, know his own creation, He who is the Subtle one, of everything informed?” (Q. 67:14). The demonstration concludes also that God does not know things through a kind of derived science; therefore, it is necessary that, of the existing beings, a knowledge exists whose modalities are not known,⁸⁶ and such is the eternal science (of God)—praise be upon Him!

How is it then possible for one to imagine that the peripatetic philosophers would deny that eternal science embraces the particulars? Instead, they think that God induces precognitive anticipations in dreams and inspires the revelation and other kinds of advices!

This is what appears evident to us in the solution of the doubt (proposed at the beginning), so that the matter results completely indisputable and without any difficulty. God is He who without fail leads to reason and guides to truth. May God’s peace, mercy, and blessing be with you!

⁸⁶ Verb *kayyafa*. It is the ancient theological Islamic problem of the *bilā kayfa*, particularly supported by the Aš‘arites: God has real attributes (wisdom, life, mightiness, hearing, sight, etc.), but we do not know “how” they are or how they work and relate to the divine essence (cf. Caspar 1987, pp. 179 ff. and 209; Gardet-Anawati 1981, pp. 57–58, 66, 216...).